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**A STUDY OF THE IMPACT
OF THE DES PAMPHLET
"CURRICULUM ORGANISATION
AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS:
A DISCUSSION PAPER"**

by

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Submitted for the degree of MPhil at the Open University

January 1994

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ABSTRACT

The DES pamphlet *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: A Discussion Paper* published in January 1992 represented a governmental initiative with regard to pedagogy. This study examines the political and educational context in which the Discussion Paper was prepared and disseminated including the policies of the 'New Right', intensification of teachers' work, 'progressivism' in the primary sector and the debate over standards. Reference to these four topics will be made throughout.

The study explores two main themes. The 'career' of the Discussion Paper is considered as it progressed from its commissioning and publication in London to schools and classrooms. Its immediate impact on the media - particularly the press - will be analysed. Its subsequent influence on one Local Authority in the context of diminution of Local Authority power and on four primary schools in that Local Authority will be assessed. Although there is evidence which suggests that the Discussion Paper had some influence on the policies of head teachers and the practices of teachers its impact was limited because its recommendations were not mandatory and schools were preoccupied with implementing the legal requirements of the National Curriculum.

The second theme relates to the manner in which the Discussion Paper was, in turn, mediated in a chain reaction by various agencies or 'interest groups'. Each, to some extent, refashioned the Discussion Paper in its preferred image. For example, the intentions of the Secretary of State in commissioning the Discussion Paper are considered. The ways in which the press reported the Discussion Paper in a climate of 'moral panic' with the prospect of a general election is analysed. The conflict of the 'interest groups' represented during the writing of the Paper which serve to explain its characteristics is studied. Reference is also made to its reception by the academic community and some of the varied responses are noted. Following its delivery to schools and Local Authorities the response of one LEA - Buckinghamshire - and the manner in which this Local Authority mediated it to schools is outlined. The ways in which head

teachers, in turn, mediated the Discussion Paper to their staffs is analysed together with the strategies employed by class teachers in response. The study suggests that in schools the Discussion Paper was used as a kind of resource. Head teachers and class teachers appropriated it for their own purposes. For example some recommendations were selected to legitimise current or new school policies and classroom practices while others were ignored or rejected.

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Chapter 1. Origins and methods

The study

This study will examine the impact of the DES pamphlet *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: A Discussion Paper* by Alexander, R.J., Rose, J. and Woodhead, C. This paper represented a governmental intervention into pedagogy. Although changes in education had accelerated following the 1988 Education Act no direct attempt had been made by the government to influence teaching and learning methods in primary classrooms until it was published in January 1992. Its influence will be traced from the centre in London to classrooms in Buckinghamshire.

Some of the main characteristics of the political and educational arena at the time of the Paper will be analysed. The factors which gave rise to the commissioning of the Paper will be explored. A core chapter will show how political and educational factors became confused in the preparation of the Paper, together with the differing perspectives of the three authors. Its reception in the press in an ambience of 'moral panic' about the standards of education and 'progressivism' will be assessed. The motives for, and the manner of, mediation by one Local Authority in the context of the diminution of their power will be examined. Finally the impact of the Paper on headteachers and classroom teachers in four schools in Buckinghamshire will be considered over an eighteen month period.

The reasons for choosing this study

I chose the Discussion Paper for study partly for personal interest and satisfaction and partly because I hoped it would prove useful. Woods (1992, p.28) has commented that "the researcher's own background, interests and values will be influential in selecting a topic for research". I was particularly interested in the Discussion Paper's views and recommendations on primary practice. My job as an adviser in two local authorities for 17 years which concluded in December 1991 had involved countless visits to primary

schools and numerous opportunities for observation in classrooms and discussions with primary headteachers and teachers concerning their work. I was also very interested in some of my advisory colleagues, whether in Leeds or Buckinghamshire, who were highly protective of their designation as "primary adviser". For example one, in particular, seemed to exhibit an almost religious conception of his role and was like a missionary in schools for what Alexander (1992) has termed "a progressive ideology". His discourse tended to centre on dichotomies and slogans - he believed in learning rather than teaching, in topics rather than subjects and in progressive, rather than traditional, approaches. Alexander (1988) dubbed this "primary speak". He was hostile to class teaching but advocated individual learning programmes and argued that the "best classrooms" had many diverse activities proceeding at the same time. He enlisted the support of loyal disciples in schools and often seemed to view his success as being related to the number of "conversions" he made among teachers - especially on in-service courses. He seemed to assert and to exhort rather than to encourage debate. Signs of non-conformity like reliance on books rather than "first-hand experience", desks or tables in rows rather than in groups and subject-centred rather than topic work were vigorously castigated. At best his influence was inspirational with its child-centredness and emphasis on how children learn. At worst it could be exclusive and damaging. I developed a sympathy for those teachers who felt inadequate and excluded. For example, one teacher, rather sorrowfully, said to me "If you are not a member you are beyond the pale". It was also sad to see that some teachers felt obliged to teach in accordance with someone else's beliefs.

Alexander, in his Leeds Report of July 1991, referred to many of the same features. In this context I found the Discussion Paper of considerable interest - it seemed to represent a significant initiative to seek a middle way and a balance in primary classroom practice, although its criticism of 'progressivism' seemed, at times, confrontational. I wondered why there was this strange inconsistency in the Paper and reflected whether it might produce extreme reactions in some teachers which might impair its declared purpose of engendering debate.

I also hoped that my former experience as an adviser and my current post as Project Officer with the 'Creativity in the National Curriculum in primary schools' research project based at the Open University would stand me in good stead to undertake the necessary research. Since it was expected that the study would include an evaluation of the impact of the Discussion Paper in one Local Authority and in some schools I hoped I could use my previous contacts to gain access to officers, advisers, headteachers and class teachers in Buckinghamshire. I had gained some knowledge and understanding of L.E.A.s and I enjoy going into schools and talking to teachers. I was interested to discover their reactions to the Discussion Paper and assess how far, over time, it had influenced their classroom practices. I believed I was in a fortunate position as a member of a research team which would give me support and guidance and, possibly, facilitate access to the authors of the Discussion Paper. Thus my former and present posts were linked and, collectively, would contribute to the collection of data. In addition, the subject of my degree had been history, and most of my professional career until 1984 had involved history teaching and lecturing, working on the Schools Council History 13-16 Project and advising in history. I felt I would be able to employ some historical techniques and approaches to investigative study searching for, and collecting, evidence and in writing the account.

I also hoped the research would be useful. The publication of the Discussion Paper seemed to be a significant event. It provided a strong focus and suggested definite themes. It would be instructive to consider the link between a central initiative and local implementation and to assess its progress or 'career' in relation to various agencies or people and its impact on them as well as their influence on the Discussion Paper. I wondered whether the Discussion Paper might signal the beginning of the end of 'progressivism' as a dominant primary ideology whatever the actual extent of its influence on schools might be.

Although new to academic research, I was aware of the frequent gulf between teachers and educational researchers (Woods, 1986). In this study I was anxious to secure the

participation of teachers and curious about their reactions to the Discussion Paper, since its main purpose was to influence practice in their classrooms. I hoped that by giving them "a voice" (Elbaz 1990) the account would be grounded in teachers' views and experiences. I also hoped the quality of the study might be enhanced by regular feedback from the research team of which I was a member. This triangulation has proved invaluable to me.

The methods used for collecting the data

Although a commentary on the methods employed and the ways in which the data was collected will be incorporated into the text a brief introductory analysis will be undertaken. Whenever practical the 'voices' of the people involved in this account - classroom teachers, headteachers, officers and advisers in Buckinghamshire, the three authors and successive Secretaries of State - figure prominently. Varied methods have been used to collect data. Documentation from four schools in Buckinghamshire, the Buckinghamshire Local Authority, newspapers - especially *The Times Educational Supplement*, the National Association of Headteachers, the National Curriculum Council (N.C.C.), the National Primary Centre at Westminster College and the Department For Education (formerly D.E.S.) has been studied. Various meetings have been attended, including three staff meetings and Professor Alexander's address to Buckinghamshire primary headteachers in April 1992. Informal conversations have been undertaken with Buckinghamshire's officers, advisers, headteachers and teachers at every opportunity. There was also a telephone conversation with H.M.I. Rose in February 1993.

Four primary schools provided most of the data for this study. Three of the primary schools were selected as I was already involved in frequent visits to interview the headteacher and to observe and to interview one or two classteachers for the Open University project 'Creativity in the National Curriculum in Primary Schools'. It seemed expedient to take advantage of this opportunity as positive relationships between teachers and researcher already existed. It also seemed appropriate to seek the participation of a Combined School (5 - 12) since two First Schools and one Middle School were already

involved. Little Kingshill Combined School was selected not only because it completed a cross section of types of primary schools in the same area as the other three and increased the sample but also because it had a new headteacher who in January 1992 had been in post for one term. The other three schools had headteachers of three, six and eighteen years in post.

The major method of collecting data was through interviews. During the eighteen month period of this study from January 1992 to July 1993, 43 interviews were undertaken. The following tables will provide a detailed analysis:

INTERVIEWS

With Buckinghamshire's C.E.O.	3
With Buckinghamshire Headteachers	18
With Buckinghamshire teachers	13
With Buckinghamshire Officers/Advisers	6
With two authors and an author's substitute	3

INTERVIEWS IN BUCKS SCHOOLS

INTERVIEWS IN THE FOUR SCHOOLS IN THE STUDY

	Headteacher	Class teacher 1	Class teacher 2
Little Kingshill Combined School	3	1	0
Newtown First School	3	2	0
Prestwood First School	3	2	2
Prestwood Middle School	3	2	1

INTERVIEWS IN OTHER SCHOOLS

Alex Campbell Middle School	1	0	0
Allan Shaw Combined School	1	1	0
Cuddington First School	1	0	0
Elangeni Middle School	2	2	0
Lakes First School	1	0	0

The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over one hour and the average length was approximately 45 minutes. On most occasions three quarters of an hour :

seemed to be appropriate for both parties and gave sufficient time for the interview to develop. All but ten of the interviews were tape-recorded. Permission to record the interview was always requested except in the cases of Alexander, Richards (substituting for Rose) and Woodhead, where I judged, perhaps over-cautiously, that a request to record might have alienated or inhibited the interviewee. Five other interviews were not recorded by the wish of the interviewee. In each case the headteacher, officer or adviser preferred to speak "off the record". In two instances the interview was not recorded because it proved impractical because of background noise. All class teachers, without exception, agreed to have their interview recorded, although three were hesitant at first but responded to what I hoped was gentle persuasion. Agreement was also sought for notes to be taken during the interviews. No objection was made to this by any of the interviewees, although Alexander and Richards were anxious to be assured that any material written during the course of the interview would be used only for research purposes.

Most of the interviews were located in schools. Headteachers were usually interviewed during school hours in their offices except for one informal, unrecorded interview in the garden of a public house during lunch time. The use of the office ensured privacy and the headteachers gave instructions that interruptions were kept to a minimum. Teachers were interviewed either at lunch time or, more often, after school. Most of the interviews took place in their classrooms. Not only were the teachers on familiar territory, but it also provided them with instant access to children's work and resources for illustrative purposes during the interview. However, there were interruptions from cleaners, children or parents which often impaired the flow of the interview. The three interviews with Stephen Sharp, Buckinghamshire's Chief Education Officer, took place in my home at his request. It was convenient for him to call at about 8.00 a.m. before driving on to County Hall. After experiencing difficulties with interviews in public houses, with their distractions and noise, and in County Hall, I decided to invite my former advisory colleague, Pauline Martin, to three successive interviews in a quiet corner of a lounge in a hotel three miles from Aylesbury. This provided a relaxed yet business-like ambience

with comfortable chairs and refreshments on neutral territory. It would have been difficult to remain uninterrupted in County Hall and it was also convenient for her to travel to her next appointment. It might have been beneficial if this type of location could have been provided for interviewing class teachers, but this was not practical as they preferred me to join them in their schools which saved them time and travelling.

Ball (1990) and Woods (1992) have drawn attention to the importance of trust and rapport between researchers and teachers and to some of the inter-personal and social skills necessary for effective interviews. I was fortunate that I knew all the headteachers and all but one of the class teachers interviewed, in my former role as adviser. This gave me access but I was anxious to explain the purposes of my research and my new role as clearly as possible (Woods, 1986). I was aware that there might be the potential for role confusion in me, and also in the perceptions of the teachers of me, and that the nature of my former role might impact upon my new relationship with them. I was also aware of the pitfall of preconceived views, so was very conscious of the injunction of 'making the familiar strange'. I also hoped that my basic beliefs about teachers would assist in new relationships. I valued them "as persons, not as research objects" (Day, 1991 p.539) and respected their professionalism. I was well aware that participating in an interview took their time and constituted another task in an already heavy workload. Invariably, it was helpful to chat with the teachers to establish rapport and to give them time to recover from previous concerns before the interview began. It soon became clear that the major preoccupation of teachers was implementing the National Curriculum, so in interviews we tended to begin with their concerns about the National Curriculum and moved on later to considerations raised by the Discussion Paper. All the headteachers and class teachers interviewed, except two, seemed to be comfortable and expressed themselves freely. The two class teachers, in question, seemed inhibited, and it was difficult to encourage them to speak with ease about their practices. Details of the interviews with the authors of the Discussion Paper are discussed in the text.

I had some previous general experience of interviews or consultations in my work as an adviser and voluntary counsellor but none of interviewing for research purposes.

However mindful of Becker's advice quoted in Woods (1992, p.23) to "just go out there and do it" I plunged in and, to a degree, learned by doing and by trial and error. Initially many mistakes were made. I was often guilty of asking not only leading questions but multiple questions. Analysing a transcript of an interview with the research team was often painful but always instructive, but even after 42 interviews I was still unable to avoid the occasional leading question. The model for which I was aiming was that of a "conversation" (Woods, 1986, p.67 and Burgess, 1988, p.137). However, various factors often conspired to thwart this ideal. The presence of the tape-recorder was sometimes intrusive to some teachers, although I often tried to introduce a light note by referring to it as "an infernal machine". I was also inhibited from giving my own views, as is natural in conversations, for fear of being too directive and influential. Also, at times mindful of the need to cover the ground in an interview I was too ready to move the teacher on rather than staying where (s)he was. I gradually came to realise the value of "thick description" (Denzin 1970) and encouraged interviewees to give examples and to check for accuracy and understanding by pressing points. The counselling technique of summarising what the client has said and re-phrasing it for checking back was found useful in this context.

When asked, most of the teachers indicated that they preferred semi-structured sessions in which the main issues for consideration were notified in advance of the interview. Sometimes we would discuss the 'agenda' on the telephone when arrangements for the interview were being made. Alternatively, I would send a brief list of the main issues I hoped we would explore. Gradually these 'agenda' developed from previous interviews. As the interviews progressed I began to discern patterns and themes emerging from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and placed these on the agenda for further exploration. Perhaps this was a kind of "progressive focusing". However, it was always a concern to ensure that the agenda did not inhibit the interviewee from discussing the issues uppermost in their minds.

Tape-recording most of the interviews proved useful. It not only provided a record of the conversation but a release from undue concentration on note-making. It facilitated careful listening and eye contact. A transcript of the interview was sent to each teacher. It not only provided the teacher with a record of what was said but was also useful for reference at the next interview or for a follow-up visit to the teacher to check details.

Although some teachers expressed initial anxiety about being interviewed, particularly on the first occasion, all commented positively on the experience after the interviews. Stenhouse (1984, p.222) stated that teachers appreciate "an opportunity of telling someone how they see the world" and how "the occasion is slightly flattering to the person being interviewed". Nias (1988) has noted "the hunger teachers show to reflect upon their professional lives" and Woods (1986, p.69) has commented on "the potential therapeutic element" in interviews. These views were confirmed by the teachers in this study who made comments like "That did me good" and "It's good to be able to tell someone" at the conclusion of their interview.

Lacey (1976) and Woods (1992, p.43) have argued for an integration of methods in research and, in particular, have stressed the value of interviews "accompanied by observation". Classroom observation was undertaken with three of the teachers interviewed. I spent an hour in each of the classes of two teachers in a first school as a non-participant observer. The natural setting was disturbed as little as possible and I was enabled to be relatively detached and to maintain an analytical distance. The teachers were also available for questions and discussions after the lessons. The teachers' practices were assessed in relation to their statements in their interviews and also provided substance and shared material for the next interview. I joined the other teacher with her class for one day a week for most of the Autumn Term 1992. Our roles were defined as teacher/researcher and researcher/teacher and an account of this collaboration appears elsewhere (Woods and Wenham 1993). This project gave me opportunities for a sustained scrutiny of the teacher's classroom practices and for numerous discussions. The findings will be incorporated into the text but it was instructive, for example, to compare

her practice (by observation) with her perceptions of it (in interview and discussion). She had been trained on 'progressive' lines and although experience had considerably modified her practice she still, in discourse, upheld 'progressive' principles.

However, observation was not the only method employed to check out the details of interviews. For example, the C.E.O.'s interviews were considered in relation to two of his annual reports, his letters to primary headteachers and the views of officers and advisers. It was also possible to review what Alexander said in interview with his academic writings. The clues teachers reveal in their classrooms, together with school documentation - for example brochures for parents and curriculum policy statements - were also used in conjunction with their interviews.

Chapter 2: The Political and Educational Context

The purpose of this chapter is to survey aspects of the context into which the Discussion Paper was published in January 1992. These include the development of the 'New Right' in political influence, the debate over standards in primary education, the intensification of primary teachers' work, and 'progressivism' in primary schools.

The role of the 'New Right'

The political and educational arena in which the Discussion Paper was launched in January 1991 had been substantially shaped by the programme of the 'New Right'. Since Prime Minister Callaghan's Ruskin College speech of October 1976 there was evidence of the increasing influence of the 'New Right' together with mounting criticism of primary (and secondary) schools.

The origins of the educational wing of the 'New Right' may be discerned in the 'Black Paper' lobby in publications like *The Fight for Education - a Black Paper* (1969) and *Black Paper* (1975) which amongst various misgivings criticised 'progressive' teaching methods in primary schools. The response of the media generally to the publication of Bennett's *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (1976) illustrated the climate of these times. After the Conservative electoral victory in 1979, such groups as the Centre for Policy Studies and the Education Unit of the Institute of Economic Affairs became increasingly influential.

Salter and Tapper (1985) have warned against viewing the ideology of the 'New Radical Right' as homogeneous - for example the tension is marked between the advocates of the free market mechanisms and the supporters of social order and traditional values. Nevertheless certain underlying themes can be identified. The 'New Right', for example Sexton (1977), has advanced economic arguments in support of a free market and an emphasis on individualism. State education should become more subject to private funding and to market forces and to consumer demand, Schools should operate in a competitive market in which they act independently. This competition would, Sexton

urged, make the schools more efficient. The Local Authority 'monopoly' of schooling should be broken, different types of schools should be established and the principles of individual and of local responsibility and of parental choice should be extended. As Sexton (1977) also asserted "The exercise of parental choice is the key. The very exercise of that choice, and the response to that choice, will produce the schools which the parents want and the children need". The 'New Right' was also concerned to reduce the powers of Local Authorities. It was argued that their traditional planning role would interfere with market mechanisms. Moreover some Local Authorities were deemed irresponsible. For example some persisted with high spending whilst others intervened with centralist initiatives such as those related to anti-racist policies and to equal opportunities programmes.

The 'New Right' attacked "the system of producer domination" in education. "It is in effect a state monopoly which educates 93% of our children. It is the absence of consumer input." *Save our Schools* (Conservative Political Centre 1986). Increasingly criticism of teachers and of standards in schools was voiced. Greater accountability of teachers was urged. In most 'New Right' circles a growing belief in the necessity of some control of the curriculum was apparent. In addition a strong impulse to rein back public spending on education was manifest.

There are many factors in the increasing influence of 'New Right' policies during the 1980s and early 1990's. The major catalyst was the longevity of the Conservative government and Mrs Thatcher since 1979, which gave the opportunity for many aspects of the 'New Right' programme to be transformed into legislation. Flude and Hammer (1987), have identified the importance of economic and demographic trends. Economic recession and the decline of the competitiveness of British manufacturing industry have been apparent since the 1970s. Conservative governments since 1979 responded with policies of monetary restraint to reduce inflation and with the development of 'an enterprise culture' as a means of stimulating economic growth. Under this economic doctrine public expenditure and state services were perceived as a burden on the economy

and a cause of the uncompetitiveness of British industry. Thus Conservative governments have sought to reduce public expenditure, to open up public services to consumer demand and to target the allocation of public expenditure to selected outcomes. In addition it is axiomatic that with economic depression an education service is subject to searching scrutiny. There was considerable concern that there was an academic bias in the education system and the 'New Right' argued that wealth creation, the profit motive and engineering generally were accorded low status in Britain compared with most other manufacturing countries. The 'New Right' increasingly criticised progressive teaching methods, the autonomy of the teaching profession and alleged falling standards in basic subjects. In short it was argued that the system was not geared to national needs.

Thus the policies of the 'New Right' were fuelled by their prevailing misgivings concerning the performance of schools. This dissatisfaction with schools was given substance by the publication of a number of official reports in the 1980s. For example the White Paper *Better Schools* published in March 1985 was critical of many aspects of schools including inadequate standards of pupil performance, wide variations in quality of education in different areas, lack of curriculum planning and of agreed curriculum policies. There was criticism of an over concentration on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, lack of opportunities for work in the scientific, practical and aesthetic areas of the curriculum. A "significant number" of teachers were reported to be performing at a low standard. The need for improved career development for teachers to foster practical teaching skills and to enhance the breadth and depth of subject knowledge was advocated. A greater influence for parents and reform in the composition of governing bodies and clarification of their functions were urged. *Better Schools* represents only one of the many reports critical of schools during this period. It was a climate in which the policies of the 'New Right' not only flourished but also to which they contributed.

Demographic factors also influenced the political context. Since 1970 there was a reversal of the post-war trend of rising school rolls. A declining school population not only reduced the bargaining power of teachers but it has also contributed to weakening

the position of local authorities. Local Authorities were subject to tightening central controls on public expenditure and pressure to discard surplus school places and teachers. Increased control and economies in setting Local Authority spending targets and the demands of the Audit Commission for financial savings put Local Authorities under severe pressure to rationalise school provision.

Thus a complexity of factors contributed to the increasing ascendancy of the 'New Right' which found dramatic expression in the Reform Act of 1988. This was arguably the most radical overhaul of education this century. Although Ozga (1989) has questioned the concept of partnership between schools, Local Authorities and Government, the 1988 Education Act struck at the heart of the traditional view of partnership and of consensus by the assertion of greater central control. However this centralist tendency was to some extent, tempered by a more influential role envisaged for parents and Governing bodies.

One of the main features of the 1988 Education Act which shaped the context for the Discussion Paper was the establishment of a National Curriculum based on subjects. As has been shown, the impulse for a National Curriculum largely rested on alleged inadequacies in primary and secondary curricula. The 1988 Education Act instituted the basic framework of the National Curriculum - subsequent Orders, Circulars and Regulations - completed the detailed requirements. The National Curriculum was subject-centred comprising the three core subjects of mathematics, science and English, the other foundation subjects of technology, history, geography, art, music, physical education and a modern language (at age 11) and a compulsory, non-foundation subject - religious education. Each subject apart from religious education has Attainment Targets, programmes of study and systematic, but varying, assessment procedures.

The Government intended that these assessment procedures with their specific statements of attainment would provide a new source of educational information. One of the principles of the 1988 Act was the right of all interested parties to have appropriate information about what was being taught and achieved. For example, it was argued that pupils and parents should know what pupils are being taught each year and how that

relates to the National Curriculum Attainment Targets and programmes of study and how the individual pupil has performed against the Attainment Targets and by comparison with the range of marks achieved by pupils in his or her class. This programme was summarised in two pamphlets in 1992 - one for parents - *Your Child's Report - What it means and how it can help* (DES Parents' Charter) and one for teachers - DES Circular No. 5/92 *Reporting pupils' achievement to Parents*. These pamphlets propounded the view that teachers should know how individual pupils were progressing so that they could decide on appropriate next steps for that learning and how pupils in their class overall were achieving as compared with the Attainment Targets with other similar classes in the school, and with other schools in the same L.E.A. and with the national average.

Inherent in the 1988 Education Act was the belief that parents, governing bodies, employers and all in the local community should know what a school's assessment results indicated about performance and how they compared with those of other schools within the immediate area and L.E.A. In order to inform their choice of school parents also needed to know about the curriculum followed in each school and its schemes of work.

It was this prescribed National Curriculum which provided the main feature of the educational landscape in which the Discussion Paper was launched in January 1992. There were other aspects of the 1988 Act which were also influential in shaping the context including Open Enrolment, and enhancement of the powers of Governing bodies, the direct appointment of members of the National Curriculum Council and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council by the Secretary of State and the removal of the ability of either schools or Local Authorities to institute curriculum development without the sanction of the Secretary of State. In addition the systems of delegated financial management and of opting out (Grant Maintained Schools) were set in motion.

The triumph of the policies of the 'New Right' was palpable. The education system had been radically re-shaped. The powers of Local Authorities were to be diminished. Schools were to be re-organised as semi-autonomous competitive units. The teaching profession was to be made more accountable. The influence of the education

establishment had been attacked. Consumers - as outlined in *The Parents' Charter* - were to be given greater power and information on which to base decisions and judgements.

The 'New Right' has been able to assert its ideology of an "enterprise culture". Yet there was a puzzling paradox. The changes in the 1988 Education Act seemed simultaneously to embody two opposing forces - the extension of central control on the one hand and an impulse towards decentralisation to individual schools on the other. Moreover as Whitty (1989) has shown, market forces had been given their head in whole areas of policy which had previously been subject to detailed planning by central and local government. Yet prescription had been introduced into one area - the curriculum - where there had been autonomy - except in religious education. Whitty identified two strands in the 'New Right' - the neo-liberal and the neo-conservative. He argued "that what was distinctive about Thatcherism was its capacity to link a neo-conservative emphasis on tradition, authority and national identity with an espousal of neo-liberal free market 'economics'". The 'New Right' ideology was based on a blend of moral and economic, academic and philosophical doctrines sometimes complementary and sometimes in tension. Whitty (1989 p.331) suggested that, provided the discourse of the 'New Right' as political rhetoric struck a chord and commanded assent, its internal inconsistencies could be regarded as something of an irrelevance. He suggested that one explanation of the curriculum prescription in the context of market forces was that the curriculum needed to be 'policed' to ensure that collectivist ideology of the post-war era was restrained until the ideology of the new structure was sufficiently developed to do its work. Thus the apparent contradictions in the 'New Right' may be made a product of differences between short and long term strategies. In this context the prescribed curriculum - criticised, for example, by Lord Joseph and Stuart Sexton - might be a short term device to re-educate consumers to use their new found power responsibly and to free them from dependency upon 'professional experts'.

Pollard (1992) has commented on how the legislation of the late 1980s brought changes in almost every aspect of primary education including funding, accountability,

management enrolment, curriculum and assessment. Yet a particular area remained conspicuously in the hands of the teaching profession. This was the 'how' - teaching strategies, methods and approaches in the classroom. It had become apparent to the Secretary of State, as evidenced in his statement of intent in December 1991 that control over the curriculum without pedagogic direction would limit the Government's educational reforms. Moreover the impact of the Leeds Report by Alexander in July 1991 gave Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State of Education of the day, an opportunity. It was this area that Clarke commissioned Alexander, Rose and Woodhead to review in December 1991. Classroom practice had remained uncontrolled and jealously guarded by teachers as perhaps the ultimate professional residue of the original 'secret garden of the curriculum' which had been almost completely appropriated otherwise by the policies of the 'New Right'. Clarke's commission will be considered in the next chapter.

The Debate over standards

The contemporary debate over standards in primary schools also provided a significant aspect of the political and educational context in which the Discussion Paper was launched. Standards in education remain a notoriously elusive concept. Husén (1979) refers to two uses of the term 'standards' - on the one hand it can be viewed as something absolute, a level of competence to be attained while on the other it can be seen as something relative, a comparison of a pupil or class of pupils with a relevant population.

The debate over standards raises many issues. Bell (1981) has suggested many aspects of the philosophical issues related to what standards constitute. There is political partiality. For example, as we have seen, the 'New Right' since the 1970s had taken it as axiomatic that standards were declining. There are also the factors of vested interests. The imprecise nature of much of the evidence available and its frequent inaccessible technicalities generates further problems. As Woods (1984, pp.319-320) suggested "there is a great deal of scope for (a) finding what you want to find and (b) attacking projects which come to conclusions you do not like". He argued that "the debate is often conducted in acrimony rather than scholarship" and advocated the application of common

sense. "Common sense can tell us a great deal", for example "that all one-sided, clear cut answers are improbable and highly suspect given the complicated scenario It can tell us which factors in this scenario have been taken into account and which have not. It can help us pick up value judgements and other unsubstantiated statements, and be alert to the degree to which positions have been acknowledged and assumptions revealed".

One episode in the recent saga of concern over standards relative to primary reading illustrates many of the features of the current debate. Martin Turner, an educational psychologist, published a report critical of both standards and methods in reading in 'Sponsored Reading Failure' (1990). A later article 'Organised Inferiority? Reading and the National Curriculum' (1992) summarised the substance of his argument. Turner (1992, p.1) affirmed "a teaching emphasis on mastery of the code aspects of written language shows a superiority over an emphasis on meaning in research studies on effective methods. However the traditional phonic and the more recent 'look say' methods have recently been displaced by a reliance on literary skills 'emerging' from exposure to good children's literature, 'real books' rather than books designed to aid in the learning of reading. It is this emphasis on stories and meaning rather than the mastery of the code which permeates the National Curriculum". Turner (1992, p.7) suggested that English Attainment Target 2 is based on an outmoded theory about reading. "Assessment procedures elevate unessential and extraneous features of reading and blur any useful distinction between stages in the mastery of print".

Turner reported that in some Local Authorities standards of reading had been falling since the mid 1980s and attributed this decline to use of 'real books'. Immediately this provoked a predictable reaction in the media. The press, especially of the right - both quality and popular - trumpeted the alleged failure of reading in primary schools. Argument and counter argument raged during the summer of 1990. As was usual, teachers, advisers and teacher trainers were criticised in the media for using expressive methods based on 'real books' rather than structured reading schemes. In turn representatives of teacher associations and some lecturers in Colleges of Education

defended current methods in reading and argued that standards in reading had not fallen. It was only later that some commentators seriously questioned the basis of Turner's research and how many schools, in fact, used the 'real books' approach as the sole basis of teaching reading. As the controversy gathered momentum taking up a position seemed more common than a rigorous examination of the issues. Nevertheless the 'facts' are difficult to ascertain and levels of literacy and children's reading ages are elusive.

The findings of the D.E.S. Report *Standards in Education 1989-90* (1991), were noteworthy in the context of this controversy. The Chief Inspector reported the standards of reading "were satisfactory or better in 80% of schools but were poor in the other 20%. Clearly the fact that there are unsatisfactory standards of reading in one in five schools is seriously worrying". Therefore Turner's concern over standards in reading was supported to this extent by the conclusions of H.M.I. However H.M.I. did not share Turner's view that the main reason for this was 'real books'. H.M.I. asserted that poor work was not strongly associated with any particular method of teaching reading. They argued "It (poor work) appears to have much more to do with inadequate planning; unsound management and organisation of the teaching and learning; inconsistencies in applying teaching methods and poor assessment of children's progress." As is often the case, perhaps because of their inevitably restricted time in any one school, H.M.I. made no reference to the background influences of children. Others like Betty Root (1991), former Director of the Reading Centre at Reading, emphasised these influences - "The real problem is that we are not a literate society. Children don't see their parents reading." The Assessment of Performance Unit reported that primary pupils who watched over six hours of T.V. a day obtained significantly lower reading scores than those who watched between two and five hours a day. Lake (1991) has also drawn attention to the significance of the background of pupils in the reading debate. A twelve year survey of children's reading abilities in one area of Buckinghamshire showed a slight decline in reading standards. However Lake attributed this largely to trends in our society - that is the pupils' home backgrounds - rather than to the practices of schools.

The issue of reading standards demonstrates how quickly in the educational climate of the early nineties a debate can become a highly charged controversy in which assertion rather than reflection predominates. Research methods are often highly complex and difficult to evaluate. Differing conclusions are frequently drawn from the same evidence. All the factors in a given scenario are not taken into account. Benchmarks in any consideration of standards are difficult to find. Sections of the press are all too ready to seize on any research which can be interpreted as a decline in standards and a failure of schools and promote a sense of 'moral panic'.

The Conservative Government made it explicit that the main motive behind the 1988 Education Reform Act was to raise standards. For example *A Parents' Guide* (1991) affirmed "The National Curriculum is designed to raise standards". The underlying assumption appeared to be that it was self-evident that standards were low. To some extent this government view was reinforced by successive H.M.I. reports. *The Annual Report* of H.M. Senior Chief Inspector of schools of 1992 provided a 'snap shot' of education in the year immediately before the publication of the Discussion Paper. It stated that overall standards of work in primary schools had remained much the same as the previous year. Of the sessions seen in schools by H.M.I. 70% were satisfactory or better and 30% were poor. Standards differed considerably often between schools in similar circumstances. The work in the core subjects and much of the rest of the curriculum continued to be better matched to pupils' abilities in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. Nearly all schools, it was reported, gave priority to the basic skills while seeking to broaden the range of the curriculum. The Report drew attention to the fact that standards of work in schools serving areas of marked social and economic disadvantage were commonly much less satisfactory than elsewhere.

The Report then scrutinised areas of the curriculum. In English standards of reading were adjudged to be satisfactory or better in about 80% and the rest poor. In particular, older children needed their skills extended, especially in work requiring study and information-handling skills. More attention was being paid to spelling and handwriting

than before the introduction of the National Curriculum but the range and purposes and of audiences for which children wrote was too limited. In mathematics about 70% of the work in both key stages was satisfactory or better. A broader range of mathematics than previously was being taught in line with the requirements of the National Curriculum but more needed to be done to ensure that by the end of Key Stage 1 the vast majority of children had a firm grasp of addition and subtraction. The Report affirmed that "The National Curriculum requirements in science have been introduced reasonably effectively in a majority of schools but to improve upon this further teachers need to deepen their subject knowledge, manage practical work more effectively and review the place of science in topic work." In the remainder of the curriculum little change was reported in the standards of work.

In relation to assessment the Chief Inspector reported that teachers were continuing to develop their ability to assess children's progress in relation to the National Curriculum during the course of their teaching. Learning was enhanced when assessment was successfully integrated with teaching. In spite of some teachers' claims to the contrary, expectations of children were raised in many schools as a result of the introduction of National Curriculum assessment procedures in Year 2. The results from the first assessments of pupils' achievements carried out in the summer of 1991 provided unique information on the performance of Year 2 pupils. Assessments were made in English, mathematics and science. Broadly similar proportions of pupils attained level 2 across the three core subjects (61-66%). Overall the distribution of results across the levels for English was in line with expectations. The proportions of those achieving level 3, however, varied significantly for mathematics (6%) in contrast with English (17%) and science (22%). Particular difficulty was encountered by children in relation to some attainment targets in mathematics where the levels achieved were generally lower than those for English. While the overall results for science revealed more pupils attaining levels 2 and 3 than for English, children found some science attainment targets much more difficult than others.

The Annual Report of the Chief Inspector for 1991-92 presents an important source of information on standards in primary schools on the years before the publication of the Discussion Paper. It has been summarised in detail because it represents a professional review of standards from a relatively objective viewpoint and encapsulates the main findings of other H.M.I. reports. As ever, H.M.I. methodology may be challenged and its main findings on standards are open to differing interpretations. Some would question the criteria on which H.M.I. make their judgements. Although it could be argued that its picture of uneven standards and some poor work in some classes represents several misgivings over standards in primary schools it is difficult to find evidence to suggest that standards are in decline. The overall conclusion would appear to be that standards certainly are not falling. Indeed the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for the previous years 1989-90 (1991) asserted "The past year has been marked by a public concern about standards in education. The findings of H.M.I.'s wide ranging inspection of the education service, which are drawn together in this report, give no support to the claims that there has been a general fall in educational standards. That is not to say all is well." Those critical of standards in schools would, of course, claim that the original base line for H.M.I. judgements on standards was too low. Moreover, it is perhaps not surprising that in the Annual Report of 1990-91 the wide-ranging requirements of the National Curriculum were not challenged. Any conclusions drawn from the results of the first S.A.T.s should be very cautious. Nevertheless comparisons with S.A.T.s results in subsequent years may provide a useful perspective for indications - albeit rough and ready - of standards in primary schools.

Thus the Discussion Paper was launched into an arena where there was considerable public concern and debate about standards in primary schools. The major thrust of government policy was "to lever up standards", the press - particularly the right wing quality and popular newspapers - seized every opportunity to attack standards and to claim they were either poor or falling, while the Secretary of State's professional advisers - H.M.I. - were reporting that standards were not declining overall, indeed there was evidence of improvement.

The intensification of teachers' work

The intensification thesis not only provides a perspective for viewing the context in which the Discussion Paper was launched, but also for analysing the meaning and impact of that Paper. This thesis was applied to teaching in the work of Apple(1986) A pattern of changes was identified in the working processes of educated personnel in advanced capitalist economies which were seeking to maintain and to advance their productivity and efficiency. Apple's thesis draws extensively on the work of Larson (1980) relating to the proletarianisation of educated labour. Many questions have subsequently been raised in relation to the intensification thesis. It presents a powerful system of analysis in relation to what is currently happening to the teaching profession in advanced countries but much more work needs to be done in order to test the theory.

Hargreaves, (1991, p. 5) has presented a helpful summary of the main propositions within the intensification thesis:

Intensification leads to reduced time for relaxation (during the working day)

Intensification leads to lack of time to keep up with one's field.

Intensification reduces opportunities for interaction with colleagues.

Intensification creates chronic work overload that fosters dependency on outside experts.

Intensification reduces the quality of service by encouraging 'cutting of corners'.

Intensification leads to diversification of responsibility and, with it, heightened dependency on experts.

Intensification creates and reinforces scarcities of preparation time.

Intensification is voluntarily supported by many teachers and misrecognised as professionalism.

The intensification thesis is an interesting theory, but to what extent it helps to explain current developments is open to debate. Some manifestations of the theory have been challenged. For example, most commentators on the English education scene - for example Acker (1990) - have argued strongly that far from reducing opportunities for interaction with colleagues the changes in primary education have led to the development

of considerable collaborative planning by teachers. Nevertheless much depends on the nature of the interaction.

Hargreaves' summary can be extended. For example there is growing evidence in England that primary teachers find that their opportunities and time to respond spontaneously to their pupils are reduced because of scheduled preoccupations with the planned programme of work, of administration and of assessment. In addition the sheer pace and extent of changes in education in England can be construed as a further aspect of intensification. For example Osborn and Pollard (1990) have commented on the major anxieties expressed by teachers over the pace and extent of the changes.

The National Curriculum, with its subject basis, its schedule of attainment targets and programmes of study and its structured assessment suggests aspects of intensification. It is an externally, imposed agenda from 'experts' on which teachers were not consulted. Work is broken down into compartmentalised pieces, considerable administration is required, teachers' professional initiative is restricted and the whole system is underpinned by testing and by public reporting.

Another significant development concerns the increased accountability of teachers and the change in working conditions from the previous informal arrangements, *The School Teachers pay and conditions document* (1987) laid down in specific detail the working requirements of teachers. In relation to working time it stipulates "a teacher employed full time ... shall be available for work for 195 days in any year, of which 190 days shall be days on which he (*sic*) may be required to teach pupils" and "a teacher shall be able to perform such duties at such times and such places as may be specified by the head teacher ... for 1265 hours in any year "

Educational research in the last five years has often related to, and supported, aspects of the intensification thesis in its application to teachers' working conditions. Nias has rightly encouraged a close consideration of the commitment of primary teachers and the purposes and meanings they attach to their work. Woods (1985) has propounded the

"opportunities to teach" concept. The constraints under which many primary teachers teach frequently include minimal non-contact time, large classes and a number of children with special-needs.

Recently two studies have shed further light on the intensification thesis. Acker (1990, pp.259-260) argued that the Statutory Orders "contain the programme by which teachers are to bring about ends set by others". She pointed out that for primary teachers to master all the current material on the National Curriculum "would require astronomical amounts of time". She reminded us that "once ends are affirmed, bringing them about is a matter for technical decisions. Everything can be broken down into components and measured and education is reduced to a series of skills and techniques to be transmitted and tested by suitably trained personnel." Acker affirmed the development of a further aspect of control over teachers by the practice of public reporting of pupils' test results. Acker (1990 p.261) drew attention to the particular vulnerability of women teachers first explored by Apple (1986) and Densmore (1987) "to the proletarianising processes and ideological manipulation because of their subordinate position in schools' patriarchal authority structures".

Campbell (1991) in his study of teachers in Key Stage 1 has reported a significant increase in the number of hours infant teachers work compared with their previous workload. On average they work nearly 50 hours a week while some work over 70 hours. Although most teachers had made heroic efforts to comply with the new requirements unmanageable workloads were reported. Teachers spoke of the development of stress, reduction on the enjoyment of teaching and a fear that 'someone' would check up on them. In addition diminished career aspirations, a growth in administrative tasks and complex systems of assessment were noted. The keynote of this study, however, was the pervasive sense of teacher conscientiousness which sometimes seemed to be putting personal health and the quality of contacts with children at risk.

Signs of intensification are certainly present in English primary schools. Yet caution is necessary in viewing the intensification thesis as a single explanation of changes in

teachers' work. Doubts may be cast on aspects of the theory. "Teacher-proof curriculum packages" have been advanced by Apple (1986) as a sign of intensification but there is very little evidence of their presence in English schools at the moment. Teachers freely incorporate curriculum schemes for example Ginn Mathematics or Science 5-13, within their own teaching strategies and resources. On the whole, primary teachers seem to view education as a child-centred process rather than a product. Moreover not all the increased commitment of teachers can be explained by the intensification of the labour process. Acker (1990), for example, has argued that teachers' motivation is largely related to improving the quality of service for children. There is also evidence emerging of teachers' successful adaptation to the National Curriculum - for example in Nias, Southworth and Campbell (1992). Woods (1992) has summarised the nature of teachers' varying reactions to the National Curriculum.

The time scale of required changes so far has been limited. The current sense of chaos may be merely a transition. Draper (1992) has applied the concept of 'status passages' to education. The three main stages of the state before, of a period of liminality and of eventual accommodation may be instructive here viewed on a national scale. Evidence is needed over longer time scales - for example how do today's conditions compare with Victorian Elementary schools? Moreover evidence for the intensification theory is mainly drawn from the accounts of individual teachers. It is often difficult to disentangle historical changes from biological changes. 'Intensification' may not influence all teachers in the same way.

It will be instructive to view the impact of the Discussion Paper from the perspective of intensification. For example does the Discussion Paper by its very publication add to the pace and variety of change facing teachers? Does the Paper represent a central initiative which will eventually wrest from primary teachers their autonomy in relation to methods of teaching which, so far, has been left within teacher preserves? Have 'external experts' been enlisted to begin a process of further control over teachers? Does the emphasis on subjects in the Discussion Paper have undertones of a division of the curriculum into

'specific packages'? As Alexander (1992) has demonstrated there was a growing realisation within Government circles that pedagogy rather than curriculum was a crucial arena.

Progressivism

Alexander (1992) has shown that although 'progressivism' has a long history current English primary ideology - sometimes dubbed 'child-centred' - is largely rooted in the Plowden Report of 1967. It has influenced the perspectives and the commitment of primary school teachers for nearly a quarter of a century and was partly instrumental in sparking off another enquiry in 1991, which, unlike Plowden, lasted weeks rather than years.

The inheritance of primary teachers before Plowden was largely based on the Elementary School tradition of economical teaching of the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Plowden offered primary teachers a rallying call, a ready-made philosophy and a coherent professional stance although it gave expression to various educational ideas already current long before the mid 1960s. Plowden ideology was based on the much quoted opening sentences of chapter 2 "at the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him". The main features of Plowden ideology based on assumptions about children learning and knowledge have been summarised by R.S. Barth (1975) in the following taxonomy:

- Children are innately curious and display exploratory behaviour, quite independent of adult intervention.
- Active exploration of a rich environment, offering a wide array of manipulative materials, facilitates children's learning.
- Play is not distinguished from work as the predominant mode of learning in early childhood.

- Children will be likely to learn if they are given considerable advice in the selection of the materials they wish to work with and in the selection of the questions they wish to pursue with respect to those materials.
- Children pass through similar stages of intellectual development, each in his own way, and at his own rate and in his own time.
- Intellectual growth and development take place through a series of concrete experiences followed by abstractions.
- Knowledge is a function of one's personal integration of experience and therefore does not fall into neatly separate categories or disciplines.
- There is no minimum body of knowledge which it is essential for everyone to know.

Walberg and Thomas (1971) would also add:

- The teacher respects each child's personal style of thinking and acting.
- The teacher sees herself as one of the many sources of knowledge and information in the classroom.

The 'progressive' standpoint, therefore, emphasised children's curiosity, active learning, sequential development, subjective knowledge and the teacher as facilitator. The Plowden Report through descriptions of 'good practice' advocated activity and experience, both 'physical and mental' as the best means of learning. Teachers were recommended to develop several 'centres of interest' around which most of the children's work could be organised. The teachers should ensure curriculum balance and an appropriate pace for each child in the class. The emphasis on the intellectual development of individual children was based on the work of psychologists, particularly Piaget. The teacher provided sensitivity and observation rather than intervention. One of the hallmarks of an effective curriculum was seen to be its flexibility and its responsiveness to children's interests. Although Plowden accepted that education ought to equip children for the society into which they grow up, a school was viewed first and foremost as a community in which children learned to live as children not as future adults. Primary schools provided an important stage of education in itself rather than

simply a preparation for future stages. The Plowden Report's assumptions were based on flexibility and integration in the curriculum, on teacher judgement and their professional commitment to improving the quality of children's learning and school partnership with parents and with Local Authorities.

Alexander (1984 p. 13-20) has argued how so called 'good primary practice' largely based on Plowden has provided primary teachers with an ideology. It enabled primary teachers to display a coherent conceptual framework in the practice of class teacher. Alexander (p.15-16) analysed how this led into the polarities of statements like "we teach children not subjects", "children learn to write by writing", "the child not the curriculum" and "learning not teaching". Emphasis has been placed on 'play', 'discovery', creativity, interdisciplinary studies, an open or integrated day and the involvement of pupils in decision making. The primacy of the class teacher and strategies like group work together with topics or 'centres of interest' based partly on a suspicion of subject disciplines for children have developed.

There is little doubt that such views and methods have been influential in the English education system. For example, some primary advisers in certain Local Authorities during the last 25 years have encouraged such programmes under the general name of 'good primary practice'. This has sometimes seemed to confer an almost moral superiority and the apparent self-evident nature of the assertion has often closed down debate. Alexander (1992 p. 143-4) argued that teachers "may have been discouraged from thinking for themselves".

Although the rhetoric of child-centredness has been pervasive since 1967 actual practice in primary classrooms would seem to demonstrate a rather different picture. Despite the extent to which child centred ideas passed into the discourse of teachers a significant corpus of educational research has shown an apparent lack of 'Plowden type' practice in many classrooms. For example studies by Bennett (1976) and Galton, Simon and Croll (1980) suggested that most practice in primary schools was more formal and teacher led than envisaged by Plowden. Bennett (1976) offered a general conclusion "that

progressive teaching is less prevalent than has hitherto been supposed". Indeed only one tenth of teachers in his study of 1976 might be described as corresponding to a Plowden approach in terms of their practice. In the Leicester Oracle study (1980) one fifth of teachers were identified in this mode.

Similarly the extensive H.M.I. survey of 1978 indicated that most primary schools gave highest priority to teaching children to read, write and learn mathematics (paragraphs 8, 16) and considered it necessary to recommend the importance of a broad curriculum (paragraphs 8, 28, 29). It found only 5% of teachers could be described as engaged in an 'exploratory' style of teaching. Simon (1981) showed how difficult it was to discover what was actually happening in primary schools. Nevertheless he suggested that since Plowden has been viewed as an inspirational and seminal document it might have been confidently expected that the D.E.S. survey of 1978 would have provided evidence of widespread Plowden practice in schools. Incidentally the accusations of the Black Paper authors, for example, Cox and Dyson (1969) and Cox and Boyson (1975 and 1977), over the supposed neglect of reading and mathematics would appear to be highly questionable. The D.E.S. Survey of 1978 reported that primary teachers had given basic subjects a consistently high priority.

A distinction must be drawn between rhetoric and reality. With this in mind Alexander (1984) suggested that 'progressivism' may be a myth. Pollard (1992) affirmed that although a succession of findings suggest that fully developed "child-centred practice" was comparatively rare in classrooms the idea remained an important rallying point for primary school teachers and as an important set of defining principles of professional commitment. Richards (1982, p.16) asserted that "...child-centred ideology (was) the orthodoxy of primary education, at least as perceived by many policy makers, commentators and educationalists". This viewpoint has received corroboration from the surveys of teachers' aims by Ashton (1975, 1981) and Broadfoot and Osborn (1988).

Although the Plowden Report has received much criticism some recommendations have resulted in legislation or are accepted as desirable if resources permitted. For example

the Plowden Report proposed that nursery education should be expanded, and that parents should be more involved in their children's schooling through regular parents' meetings, written reports once a year, open enrolment, use of school premises by the community out of school hours and parents should assist in schools wherever possible. The Report also recommended that resources should be shifted to schools in social priority areas and that primary schools should attract a greater share of education budgets. It also recommended that Local Authorities should take steps to improve unpopular schools and should formally inspect - rather than just advise - primary schools. In some aspects of its advice on classroom practice the Report had a contemporary ring - pupils should be offered a combination of individual, group and whole class work, and older children should be taught by two or three teachers to provide a range of expertise. The Report also offered very reasoned advice on the teaching of reading. It advised that "children are helped to read by memorising the look of words and phrases, often with the help of pictures, by guessing from a context which is likely to bring them success and by phonics".

However there have been considerable reservations from some relating to aspects of the Report. For example Peters (1969, p.18) has pointed out the naiveté of the Plowden picture of "one ideal method of teaching". Bantock (1975) has warned that 'It might indeed be said quite categorically that the superiority of discovery methods cannot at present be justified on grounds of empirical research'. Recently some have become increasingly concerned about a particular aspect of the Report. Although few would challenge the underlying principle of Plowden that each child is unique, the rigid developmentalism based on Piaget's stages and 'readiness' inherent in the Report has been increasingly criticised. It is argued that the application of Piagetian theory underrated children's capacities particularly in reasoning and in abstract thought and imposed on children's cognitive development a framework of seemingly fixed horizontal hurdles which may, in fact, be dogmatic and even hostile to each child's uniqueness. Plowden's fixed assumptions about children's capabilities at given ages imposed a structure which under-estimated children's potential and sometimes inhibited purposeful and appropriate

teacher intervention. As Wragg (1991 p.11) affirmed "my major criticism (of the Plowden Report) would be of its emphasis on 'readiness', while skilful teaching is sometimes about not waiting but finding a way of helping children to learn whether they seem ready or not". Vygotsky's (1962) theory of learning differs considerably for Piaget's. Edwards and Mercer (1987) have outlined aspects of Vygotsky's theory.. They affirm that social constructivism emphasises the cultural and communicative aspects of the context in which children learn. The process includes cooperation and negotiation with both teachers and other children over learning tasks. The teacher is viewed as a facilitator who provides a 'scaffolding' for the children's learning. The control of learning is handed over to the child once the cognitive edifice is secure and the child then has ownership of the knowledge.

The public debate over progressive education has often been conducted at the level of assertion. Polarity of position has been seized by adherents of both conflicting persuasions. The oft-repeated dichotomy between progressive/traditional, child centred/didactic has not been productive. The issue is more complex than this. In one sense it is a meaningless exercise to attempt to classify teachers and their styles too readily into rigid and opposing groupings. It is difficult to discover undiluted manifestations of entirely progressive or traditional practice. The general public might perceive 'progressivism' as a monolithic education movement but there are many shades of 'progressive' opinion and its source was not only from Plowden.

Nevertheless the Plowden Report acquired the reputation among right wing commentators of having been largely responsible for undermining standards. As Wragg,(1991, p.11) suggested, "'the Plowden Report is a handy scapegoat for those who have not read it carefully, for all our real and imagined ills". It is, however, true that some in their excessive Plowden zeal and others with ill-thought out practices invited criticism. Alec Clegg in 1974 spoke of "the jargon of those who have jumped on the band wagon but cannot play the instruments".

There can be no doubt that the Plowden Report presented a convenient target for criticism of primary schools. The response to Clarke's speech of December 3rd 1991 in which he commissioned the Discussion Paper was instructive. For example, *Education* (December 6th) carried a summary of the Secretary of State's speech under the heading 'The Plowden Party is finally over'. *The Sunday Times* of December 7 1991 featured an article by Clarke with the heading 'Education's insane bandwagon finally goes into the ditch'. Clarke affirmed "It does not matter for today's purposes whether Plowden was right or wrong 25 years ago. We must, however, recognise that, in the name of Plowden, grave damage has been done to parts of our education service". He concluded his short article by claiming "The ghost of pseudo-Plowden has been laid. Our schools will be in a much better position to revise their standards as a result". In the same newspaper there was a full page focus article entitled 'The Great Betrayal' in which former members of the Plowden committee were castigated "for still making excuses as the damage their work did to a generation of school children was laid bare by an official enquiry" (The Alexander, Rose and Woodhead Discussion Paper).

Conclusion

Thus the political and educational climate in which the Discussion Paper was launched in January 1992 was characterised by considerable controversy and conflict. There are stark contrasts in the underlying assumptions of the Plowden Report and in recent legislation. For example, Plowden advocated flexibility and integration in the curriculum, endorsed teacher judgement and commitment and supported partnership between schools and Local Authorities. On the other hand the assumptions associated with governmental legislation affirmed that the curriculum should be standardised, the power of the 'producers' such as teachers, L.E.A., staff and teacher trainers should be curbed and replaced by parental and industrial 'consumers'. Teachers required more prescribed contracts and more effective management. Much of this legislation would seem to have contributed to the intensification of teachers' work while the controversy over standards continued with the 'New Right' asserting that the application of Plowden principles had been responsible for

a decline in standards for a generation. This did not appear to be an arena conducive to reflective debate, particularly with entrenched positions being taken prior to the General Election of April 1992.

Chapter 3: The commissioning of the Discussion Paper

The commissioning of the Discussion Paper heralded the prospect of significant changes. In particular it represented a Government initiative into the classroom arena. Alexander (1992) argued that although the National Curriculum had been instituted, the 'how' of teaching - pedagogy - had remained the preserve of the teaching profession. The establishment of the commission, in this context, could be regarded as a further centralising tendency. The commission can also be seen as an additional element in the intensification of teachers' work. Three 'experts' were invited to make recommendations on classroom practice. Any recommendations that might be made relating to teaching and learning strategies would carry implications for the status of teachers, the conditions under which they worked and their professional responsibility.

It is apparent from Clarke, the Secretary of State, when he announced the commission, that primary classroom practices -labelled under the Plowden banner - were to be closely identified and to be subject to detailed scrutiny and attack. It seemed that the 'New Right' was about to launch a strike against 'Progressivism'. "Back to basics" was the watchword.

On December 3rd 1991 the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Clarke, commissioned Professor Robin Alexander, Chief Inspector Jim Rose and the Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council, Christopher Woodhead, "to review available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools" and "to make recommendations about curriculum organization, teaching methods and classroom practice appropriate for the successful implementation of the National Curriculum particularly in Key Stage 2".

The factors influencing the Secretary of State commissioning the Discussion Paper were varied. Following the previous year when governmental concern had focused on the teaching of reading and reading standards there is evidence that in 1991 there was considerable government activity and concern relating to primary classroom practice.

For example the Schools Minister, Michael Fallon, addressed a Primary Headteachers' conference in September 1991 and asked whether topic work delivered differentiated and challenging learning. He was reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* as stressing the value of subject-based and whole-class teaching. It was also reported that he angered conference members by suggesting that in the worst cases primary schools were like play-groups. Alexander (1992, p.193) argued that "the 1988 curriculum revolution, being in part a restatement of the centrality of the basics, may well turn out to have been frustrated by the ideology and trappings of progressivism (a possibility which, by autumn 1991, central government had at last detected)". It is clear that the Secretary of State was anxious to ensure that the government's educational reforms were not slowed down or diminished by practice in primary classrooms. He realised that pedagogy was as important as curriculum content and assessment.

The Secretary of State was also influenced by a succession of H.M.I. Reports. On the whole, H.M.I. Reports had reported that standards had been maintained. Nevertheless, H.M.I. Reports had highlighted the variability of standards in primary schools since the National Primary Survey in 1978. In recent years reports had drawn attention to unfocused topic work and some poorly organized classrooms. From 1989 no less than sixteen reports had been compiled and published. One H.M.I. Report which attracted considerable attention was *Aspects of Primary Education in France* (1991) which may have strengthened the Secretary of State's resolve to urge traditional teaching methods. According to this report by four H.M.I. who visited twelve primary schools in the Orleans region in March 1991. French teachers were more inclined than their English counterparts to teach the whole class. They used exposition and questioning effectively and their black-board work was considered exemplary. The report concluded "The French teachers provided a salutary reminder of a teaching method which many English teachers might re-instate for the benefit of their pupils."

The Secretary of State, judging by the specific mention in his statement, was perhaps unexpectedly influenced by David Hart of the National Association of Head teachers.

Hart proposed at a conference in the summer of 1991 that 9 to 11 year old children might benefit from being taught separate subjects by specialist teachers. It is significant that in his statement of December 3rd the Secretary of State also drew attention approvingly to Alexander's evaluation report of the Primary Needs programme in Leeds which was published in July 1991. Clarke (1991) asserted "One of the messages of that (the Leeds) report is one which I would support wholeheartedly. That is the call for an examination of current teaching methods from the point of view of evidence, rather than simply from theory". Indeed many of the findings in Alexander's Report on primary education in Leeds were not only echoed in the Clarke statement but also appear in the Discussion Paper. For example in the summary of the Leeds Report Alexander (1991, p.4) stated "The study raises important questions about the viability and efficacy of classroom methods and strategies widely commended in British primary education since the mid-1960s. In common with several other studies it shows how the widespread commitment to group work, multiple curriculum focus teaching (different groups of children working simultaneously in different areas of the curriculum), thematic curriculum planning delivery, and 'enquiry' modes of teacher-pupil interaction, may present teachers with problems of classroom organisation which subvert the quality of children's learning, and frustrate teachers' monitoring of the learning". He added "The Project highlighted the prevalence of certain orthodoxies about primary teaching methods (often collected together under the straight normative heading of 'good primary practice') and the extent to which many teachers feel obliged to conform to these while in some cases being all too conscious of the problems they may pose. It is likely that this conformist culture has elevated particular classroom practices into ends in themselves". Alexander (1991, p.4) went on to recommend that "Good practice should henceforth be treated as a matter for debate rather than an uncontested absolute" and "the issue (of teaching strategies is far more complex than the public polarising of formal/traditional and informal/progressive teaching methods would suggest, and the report rejects such polarities as simplistic and unhelpful".

The Leeds' Report urged a thorough review of accepted 'good practice' in primary schools and insisted that teaching methods should be a matter for the teacher and the school - not for those outside the classroom to impose. The report found evidence of low expectations particularly of disadvantaged children and recommended teachers should offer a challenging curriculum in addition to care and concern. The report also suggested that multi-focused classrooms were difficult for teachers to manage effectively and pupils were often kept busy with low order tasks. It also raised questions about the future of the primary class teacher system. It would seem that the Leeds' Report influenced the Secretary of State considerably and caused him to select Alexander. However, the recommendations in the Leeds' Report for enhanced resources - "the principle of staffing primary schools on the basis of a teacher per registration group plus at least one extra", did not seem to have the same effect on Clarke's thinking. The press coverage of the Leeds' Report was largely sensational and manipulative which presaged a similar reaction to the publication of the Discussion Paper which will be considered in the next chapter.

Clarke said that he hoped the report would help focus the debate and inform policy in the training of primary teachers and "concentrate on how best to implement the National Curriculum and to raise standards". He expected the report within two months early in the New Year and he stated his intention to publish it. It is noteworthy, that at its inception, the eventual publication was described variously by Clarke and in the press as a 'report', a 'review', and 'inquiry' and later a 'discussion paper'.

The commission was notified in a 4,500 word statement of intent from the Secretary of State. The statement offers insights into the purpose and context of the enquiry as well as Clarke's assertive views on the prevailing conditions within primary education. Many of the criticisms and recommendations in the eventual Discussion Paper of Alexander, Rose and Woodhead are foreshadowed in Clarke's statement. It seems likely that the Secretary of State selected the three because he knew their views and what they were likely to say. A brief account of this statement of intent may be instructive.

At the beginning of his statement Clarke was at pains to deny any intention of direct intervention into primary classrooms - "Let me be quite clear, however, that questions about how to teach are not for the government to determine. I have no intention to seek to expand my powers in that direction. My purpose is to initiate a discussion not to impose solutions. I want teachers to take their own decisions". In conclusion he asserted "I want to assist the debate but I would make it absolutely clear that I see teachers taking the lead. It is not for the Secretary of State to tell teachers how to teach or organize their classes. My intention is to encourage debate to cause teachers to question current practice, and the thinking which underlies it. Change in primary schools is for teachers themselves to take on". Thus Clarke offered a self-denying ordinance.

The Secretary of State during the course of his statement outlined the reasons for his concern with primary education. He asserted that "the advent of the National Curriculum has brought to the surface the latent problem of whether a broad and demanding primary curriculum can be delivered without challenge to the current received wisdom on classroom practice and curriculum organization". He continued by casting doubt on the efficacy of Plowden "discovery methods of teaching", "active learning" and on "emphasis on the development of pupils' skills rather than the teaching of subject knowledge". Clarke argued that much independent research from the 1960's onwards had raised doubts about Plowden approaches. He cited the work of Neville Bennett (1976, 1984) which suggested that in English and maths the pupils of teachers using formal methods progressed faster than those taught in informal classrooms. He omitted to acknowledge, however, subsequent criticisms of this research.

The Secretary of State's statement of intent went on to criticise "child centred teaching methods" in which "children choose what they want to do". He claimed that this approach all too often failed to ensure that children make satisfactory progress. He also drew attention to "a steadily growing body of evidence about the effectiveness of whole class teaching" and to the merits of "teaching the whole class from the front". He expressed misgivings relating to "topic work" as the main approach to curriculum

organization. Clarke's statement continued by questioning the generalist class teacher system in primary schools by asking "whether it is realistic to expect a single teacher to cover the whole curriculum at the top end of the primary curriculum?" He recommended that schools should consider the merits of specialist teaching. In addition schools should examine the question of setting "for many schools there must be scope for organizing their teaching in classes grouped more closely in accordance with their attainments in the subjects of the National Curriculum". The statement concluded by pre-empting probable Teacher Union reaction by claiming that most of the changes recommended would not require either additional expenditure or extra teachers. Clarke also argued that there was no evidence that reducing class sizes would improve standards or raise pupils' levels of achievement. However he concluded that additional in-service training to develop subject expertise would be required and more non-contact time for teachers would be beneficial.

Clarke's statement was made in the context of an impending general election and highlights his assumptions. He had assumed that the "current orthodoxy" was based on the "dogma" of the Plowden Report. He believed this had resulted in low teacher expectations, uneven standards and a general lack of rigour. He believed that if the training of teachers was reformed and if schools reviewed their practices in the light of the efficacy of whole class teaching, of greater subject specialisation and of setting, standards would be improved. Clarke's statement is pugnacious and strident. However, it does draw some of its argument from research studies in classrooms. In his statement Clarke specifically cited the research of Bennett and Alexander. He also drew attention to "a long line of independent research from the 1960's onwards which has raised doubts about whether the approach adopted after Plowden can in fact work in practice in ordinary schools". Whether it was accurate to argue that a single approach was prevalent in primary schools may be queried. Nevertheless Clarke's reference to research was opportune. Following Bennett's initial work published in 1976, the Oracle Project at Leicester University led by Galton and Simon pioneered the use of observational teaching to analyse what actually happened in classrooms. Bennett et al (1984) reported on the

match - and mismatch - between what teachers intended and what pupils learned.

Mortimore et al (1988) analysed what made one school more effective than other and included work on teaching strategies. On the whole, these research studies arrived at broadly similar conclusions. They emphasised the value of varied classroom strategies. The time children spend actually working has a direct relationship to their progress. Successful teaching requires structure and careful planning. Children should be judiciously challenged by high level work and their work carefully monitored.

The research studies also identified the sheer organizational difficulty of running a classroom with children divided into groups each working on a different area of the curriculum. They also revealed that when children are organized into groups they work largely as individuals. Truly collaborative work rarely happens and children may coast along doing the accepted minimum. These research studies had also found that only a minority of teachers use genuinely open-ended questioning. Thus Clarke used the evidence of research studies to support his argument without reference to their complexity.

Another significant issue raised in the Secretary of State's statement is whether the traditional class teacher system in primary schools can deliver the requirements of the National Curriculum. The 'basics' have now become three core subjects with a further six foundation subjects, religious education, and a range of cross-curricular themes, skills and dimensions. For example, Alexander (1992, p. 203-5) concludes that the "generalist model of primary school staffing has reached its limits". This issue will be considered further in subsequent chapters.

It could be argued that the tone of the statement demonstrates an unusual way of initiating a reflective debate amongst the teaching profession. The manner and the tone in which the debate was launched may have alienated some. Nevertheless, his statement was in keeping with the general drift of contemporary government action. Clarke's statement leaves little doubt as to the conclusion he hoped for although he insisted that the enquiry was independent. Whether the timing of the commission was opportune for

teachers is open to question as they were heavily involved in the implementation of the National Curriculum.

Immediately there were some significant responses in the press. For example the issue of *Education* on December 6th carried extracts from Clarke's statement under the heading 'The Plowden party is finally over ...' More predictably his statement gained approval from *The Daily Telegraph*. The leading article of December 4th was entitled 'Primary teachers are told to return to old methods' and asserted that "primary school teachers should abandon the stifling orthodoxy of the last 25 years and return to tried and tested methods". This article reported that Clarke had attacked the child-centred approaches introduced by the Plowden Report of 1967. It affirmed that "there was mounting evidence in Britain and abroad that children learnt more if teachers stood in front of the class and imparted knowledge in a formal, didactic way".

Meanwhile Wragg (1991) pointed out the irony that the Secretary of State's criticisms of primary education and the institution of the enquiry should coincide with the twenty fifth anniversary of the Plowden Report. In his article in *The Times Education Supplement* he commended many features of the Plowden Report and highlighted its recommendations which have been influential in primary schools. In addition to Wragg's article on December 13th *The Times Educational Supplement* also carried a report by Diane Hofkins entitled 'Three Wise Men with an Xmas deadline'. This is the first recorded use of the seasonal sobriquet for the three authors which, perhaps to their collective chagrin, has passed into common parlance in educational circles.

Clarke's statement of December 3 1991 commissioning the Discussion Paper amply encapsulates the views of the 'New Right'. The Secretary of State attacked what he saw as the primary establishment whose ideas were based on a 'progressive' and misguided Plowden ideology. He seemed intent on establishing his position and his platform in view of the impending election. The nature of his language and the arguments in the statement presage the tone of many of the articles in the press when the Discussion Paper was eventually published in late January 1992.

In a profile of Kenneth Clarke in *The Guardian* over a year later (29.1.93.) entitled 'The Minister for closed minds' Melanie Phillips makes hostile references to his time as Secretary of State for Education. She wrote "He appeared to know all the answers even before the question had been formulated. History, he decreed, should end and current affairs start, where he said they should. We all knew the outcome of his three wise men review of primary education before it had even started because he told us".

The Secretary of State's commission initiated a product and a process which is the subject of this thesis.

Chapter 4: The Hermeneutics of the Discussion Paper

Introduction

The data for this account of the making of the Discussion Paper is largely based on interviews with two of the authors - Professor Robin Alexander and Mr Christopher Woodhead, and with Mr Rose's Deputy, Mr. Colin Richards, H.M.I., as well as a telephone conversation with Mr Rose. Documentary sources include the publications of the three, together with newspaper articles and press releases.

The purpose of this chapter is to attempt to reconstruct and to interpret the preparation of the Discussion Paper which took place in the seven weeks between December 3rd 1991 and January 22nd 1992. The careers of the three authors will be considered together with their educational views expressed in their publications. The writing process will be analysed from the perspective of the selection of the authors, the time scale, the terms of reference, the procedures and the interactions during the preparation of the Discussion Paper, and, finally, some immediate reactions from the authors and academics. It will be shown that the construction of the Discussion Paper, far from being a straightforward educational exercise about primary school pedagogy, was a political matter in which 'interest groups' battled for position. It became a 'site for struggle'.

The interviews with the authors

Arranging the interviews

As this study developed, it soon became apparent that an opportunity to consult with each of the authors should be sought. Letters outlining the nature of the research and requesting an interview were sent to Woodhead and Rose in July 1992 and to Alexander in November. In each case a secretary telephoned back offering an interview and a date and time were negotiated. However, Rose's secretary said that pressure of work made it difficult for him to offer an interview, but his Deputy, Colin Richards, H.M.I., could be

approached to provide an H.M.I. perspective. Later in February, 1993, I had the opportunity of a ten minute telephone conversation with Rose.

The Interviews

	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Woodhead	NCC Offices, York	October 14, 1992	2.00 pm - 3.30 pm
Richards	DFE Offices, London	November 4, 1992	11.00 am - 12.45 pm
Alexander	University of Leeds	February 2, 1993	2.30 pm - 4.20 pm

Prompts were prepared in advance of the interviews. These were structured into three areas - the background to the reception of the commission from the Secretary of State and the writing process, issues raised in the Discussion Paper and the subsequent debate. My approach during an interview was to fall in with the interviewee's preferred style of discourse. It was decided not to request that the sessions were tape-recorded. Many of the issues were politically charged and such a request might have inhibited frankness. Notes were taken during the consultations. Immediately after a session these were checked, modified and additions were made. These notes were then written up as soon as possible as an aide-memoire for the researcher. All three interviewed queried how the notes would be used. Professional discretion was offered but no other commitments were agreed.

Access

In McKeganey and Burley (1987) issues of access for the researcher and examples of unusual experiences of researchers are outlined. The Richards and Alexander sessions were unexceptional in this respect. However, the prelude to the Woodhead consultation provided an unusual experience. Difficulties began on entering the National Curriculum Council (N.C.C.) underground car park in York. The number of my reserved parking space had been given by an official at the desk at the entrance to the offices above. Although there were some accessible spaces free, the one reserved for me proved

impossible for a normal size car to enter, as there was a concrete pillar blocking the way. The car was abandoned and a rather bemused driver returned up to the office. The official on the desk offered another space. This also proved very difficult for parking as it was very confined and enclosed by two more pillars. At this stage the frustrated driver, spotting a passing car park attendant, rather desperately suggested that the attendant might park the car, which he did after considerable difficulty. When the attendant was asked about the suitability of the first parking space offered he responded with a broad smile, which seemed to indicate that this drama might have been enacted before! This experience put me on the defensive which was compounded by further events during the interview.

The Duration of the Interviews

There was only slight variation in the duration of the interviews. The shortest was Woodhead's, the longest Alexander's. The Richards' interview included a working lunch of forty minutes.

The Format

The format of the interviews differed. At the N.C.C. the participants sat at an impressive table in a large committee room. Woodhead had invited two of his senior colleagues to the meeting. This not only took the researcher by surprise but affected the nature of proceedings. The purpose of their presence was not explained although when they were introduced they were termed "primary specialists". The two meetings, at the (Department for Education) D.F.E. and the University of Leeds, were similar in so far as they were each held in the host's room. Only the consultant and the researcher were present. The pair sat at opposite sides of a table in Richards' office. In Leeds the meeting was conducted in easy chairs in the informal area of Alexander's large room.

The Nature of the Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the preferred style of the host which I did not seek to modify. There were marked differences between them. Richards adopted the lecture mode of address. Questions from the researcher were not encouraged. The session was didactic but most informative. Richards was frank and incisive and challenged various aspects of the Discussion Paper including the section on standards, the failure to distinguish clearly between the different categories of topic work and the uncritical endorsement of subject teaching. It was only during lunch that I had the opportunity to make comments and ask questions.

Woodhead went on to the offensive immediately. He launched into a critique of the 'Creativity in the National Curriculum' Project of which I was a member. He referred to a summary of the project which I had sent to him in advance. He asserted that "It is not an open project" and I was given little opportunity to reply before he abruptly changed the direction of his attack and inveighed against the "folly of first hand experience in primary classrooms". After this opening assault Woodhead offered to respond to questions. His replies were forthright and detailed. On occasions his replies seemed to be aimed at his colleagues rather than for me. At times his two colleagues intervened. This often drew the discussion away from the Discussion Paper and its impact to other, although related, issues, for example, the N.C.C. consultation with primary teachers with which they were very much involved and the concept of creativity in primary classrooms.

On the other hand, the session with Alexander was exploratory. It was conducted as a conversation. There was a frequent reference to recent research literature. Alexander gave the impression that he wished to share ideas rather than merely rehearsing his own. He asked questions as well as responding to them. He seemed anxious to ensure that I had every opportunity to use the interview in ways that would best contribute to the research.

The atmosphere of the sessions, and the responses they engendered in me, largely reflected the personality and intentions of the host. Richards saw himself as a transmitter of information, with the researcher as recipient. He did this briskly and effectively.

Richards was very business-like in manner and enthusiastic about primary education. He was frank and was prepared to be critical, in the true sense, of a Paper of which his immediate superior was co-author. However, he appeared to be very busy and somewhat harassed. He responded to at least four telephone calls during the interview. Once I had become accustomed to Richards' preferred style of conducting the interview I found it effective and was offered useful insights as well as information.

The Woodhead interview felt taut and adversarial. There was a feeling that a position of superiority was being established and Woodhead's two colleagues were there to witness the possible discomfiture of a researcher from what Woodhead termed a 'closed' project. Woodhead had seized the initiative from the beginning of the interview and, at times, I felt as though I was the one under interrogation. His abrupt and seemingly disconnected comments at the outset of the interview had the effect of unsettling me. Throughout the session the presence of his two colleagues made me feel uneasy. I was not sure why they were there and, at times, their interventions seemed like distractions and deflected both Woodhead and me from the central purpose of the interview. Nevertheless, this session was challenging and significant insights were gained.

The Alexander interview was most relaxed from both the social and professional perspectives of the researcher. It was open and ideas and feelings were freely exchanged. It was clear that Alexander had suffered considerably from his experiences. Following both the reports with which he was associated, he described how he had suffered from "trial by tabloid" as well as severe criticism from some fellow academics. He said that he preferred to be reticent about aspects of his relationship with Woodhead and wished to be circumspect with regard to some of the political aspects of the Discussion Paper episode.

The interviews enabled me to meet two of the authors and the deputy of the third. These provided considerable insights into the personalities and the values and views of each and the context in which they worked.

The three wise men - their values and viewpoints

Alexander

Professor Robin J Alexander had come to national prominence following the report of his four years' study of primary education in Leeds in 1991. After teaching in primary schools for five years in the 1960's he became a lecturer at Didsbury College of Education, Manchester, in 1969. He moved to the University of Leeds in 1977, becoming a reader in education in 1990 and a professor soon after.

Alexander's publications before he accepted the commission in December 1991 provide detailed evidence for his educational views. In this respect there is far more data available than for his other two colleagues. His writings include the report on Leeds (1991) and an influential book *Primary Teaching* (1984). *Policy and Practice in Primary Education* (1992), which was written before the Discussion Paper but published after, contains the Leeds Report and three additional chapters which are particularly significant as they contain Alexander's views during the first nine months of 1991. Finally, there are two articles which were published in 1988 and 1989.

Alexander challenges "current primary ideology" which he argues is often manifest in "primary speak", "the pervasiveness of slogans", "shibboleths" and "polarities". He takes issue with child-centred statements like "I teach children not subjects" and "The curriculum is a walk through the autumn leaves". He is also critical of "sterile debate" in which polarities or dichotomies feature - for example, formal/informal, traditional/progressive, subject-centred/child-centred, teaching/learning. For him this kind of discourse has become a ritualistic and adversarial exchange of slogans and impoverishes meaningful professional debate. The dichotomies are falsely based, he argues, on alleged incompatibilities - for example, Alexander contends that teaching is a

process of bringing about learning while teaching is often misrepresented as merely 'telling' or instructing.

Alexander argues that current primary ideology is founded largely on 'progressivism', which was given a boost by the Plowden Report. However, he identifies other "dominant primary ideologies" and suggests that 'Developmentalism' in which learning is structured according to the child's psychological and physiological development has contributed significantly to 'progressivism'. Alexander (1988, p.149) maintains that "progressivism has provided a language of persuasion and solidarity" and "an ideological shorthand for a profession seeking to distance itself from its Victorian roots". This ideology has helped to sustain primary teachers and to provide them with a professional identity.

However, Alexander contends that this prevailing ideology has had more influence on "rhetoric than practice" and argues that successive H.M.I. reports and much research evidence has shown that primary teachers have devoted much time and care following the elementary school tradition of "the basics of numeracy and literacy" which he describes as 'Curriculum I'. Alexander (1988, p.155) has defined his 'Curriculum II' as "environmental and social, personal and moral, physical, aesthetic and expressive development and understanding". However, he contends that the prevailing primary ideology is a "kind of tyranny" (Alexander interview, 1993) and has caused many teachers unthinkingly to adopt its discourse and some "have gained advancement less by merit than by saying what the Head/Adviser wanted to hear".

Alexander (1988 and 1992) argues that all practice is based on theory. This appears to be a direct response to Clarke's notorious criticism of "barmy theory". Alexander maintains that "classroom research indicates the benefits for children of purposeful intervention by the teacher". He is critical of the rigid application of Piagetian theory with its horizontal hurdles which may be "dogmatic and crude". Fixed assumptions about children's capabilities can be restricting. Alexander exhorts the teacher to generate "cognitive challenge" for the child. Alexander (1989) contends that there is an undue emphasis on "the environment of learning rather than the learning itself" and that "the primary

curriculum tends to be characterised in terms of the child's experience rather than the teacher's agenda". His Leeds' Report (1991) highlighted that the visible features of practice are unduly emphasised - "diversity of activities at any one time, grouping, busyness, display". He calls for the use of a wide "repertoire of skills and techniques" in the classroom.

Alexander (1992a) argues that the National Curriculum has resulted in "acute pressure on primary teachers especially in Key Stage 2" with the "range and depth of subject expertise" required. He questions whether the National Curriculum "as currently conceived is really the most appropriate for primary children" and urges that "its manageability is kept under review". Alexander (1992) (p.203) considered the class teacher system and concluded "We now have to confront the question of whether the class teacher system can deliver all this" (The National Curriculum). "My own view is that it cannot". He suggests that the class-teacher system has endured so long because it was firmly established by the elementary tradition, it is economical and therefore less likely to be challenged politically and it has not been generally questioned. For example, H.M.I. in the Primary Survey of 1978 did not query it and it has become "an impregnable article of faith within the profession". Alexander (1992, p.204) argues that as expectations of the class-teacher are unrealistic "we need to broaden our repertoire of possibilities". He identifies four possible versions of the primary teacher role - the generalist, the generalist/consultant, the semi-specialist and the specialist. Alexander (1992) recommends that primary schools should be staffed "sufficiently generously in terms of numbers and kinds of expertise to allow them to make their own combinations of general and specialist teaching". (Alexander 1992, p.193). He argues that the 'resistance to subjects' in primary schools should be challenged. Alexander (1992, p.123) maintains that the National Curriculum was a "revolutionary prescription made on the questionable assumption that a revolution... could be achieved without a change in structure".

Alexander (1988) considers the practice of the grouping of children in the light of recent research - particularly the ORACLE project - and claims that "There seems simply to be an overriding assumption that grouping is one of the minimum conditions of 'good primary practice' and that no more needs to be said". He draws a distinction between the group work in which children work individually and the kind where they work in groups collaboratively.

Thus Alexander had undertaken a thorough critique of many aspects of primary education before he was invited to participate in the preparation of the Discussion Paper.

Alexander (1992) argues that "all sacred cows should be subject to scrutiny". He expresses concern about standards and about practices in some schools. He hoped he was making a contribution to "liberating primary education from the shackles of ideology and opening up new avenues of professional thinking" although he acknowledges "this (progressive) ideology was not universally espoused, still less reflected in practice". He stresses that the issues are complex and counsels against "premature and ill-conceived quick fixes". He makes an impassioned plea for "a rigorous and open debate of primary practice" with particular emphasis on "pedagogy rather than content, which constitutes the most basic reality of teaching". He believes it essential to "improve professional discourse in order to counter journalistic and political hijacking of the debate on pedagogy".

Rose

Mr A J Rose was Chief Primary H.M.I. at the time he received the commission from the Secretary of State. He had extensive experience in primary schools in England and had taught abroad. He held headship posts in two large primary schools in Leicestershire. He was involved in teaching the Nuffield Primary Science project as a teacher and contributed to in-service work, particularly in mathematics and science. He joined H.M. Inspectorate at the 'minimum' age of 35 and became a Staff Inspector five years later with responsibilities for educational disadvantage, children with special educational needs and ethnic diversity. He became a Chief Inspector in 1985. As early as October 1988 he

warned a teachers' conference that many schools would have to consider specialist teaching in certain subjects for older primary children once the National Curriculum was introduced. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 1993), in a biographical note, clarified his role after September 1992, "He is now one of two Deputy Directors of Inspection within the new Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). His main responsibilities are primary education, curriculum 5 to 16, special educational needs, educational disadvantage, research and internal relations".

Although Rose was a Senior H.M.I. with considerable experience as an Inspector, he may have been labouring under professional uncertainty in December 1991. At this time the structure and role of H.M.I. were being reviewed by the government and new arrangements for the inspection of schools which were eventually instituted in September 1992 as the new OFSTED were underway. Nevertheless, at this time, the traditional role of H.M.I. still held true. Woods (1989, p.8) summarised the position: "H.M.I. and the D.E.S. are concerned with the efficiency of the system within the policy of the government of the day. This shows a real interest in the quality of teaching but also a political concern for value for money. The D.E.S. is concerned to promote that policy. H.M. Inspectorate has more independence but is still attached to the D.E.S. and the efforts of the Inspectors are largely directed to making the system work".

It is difficult, because of his role as Inspector, to discover any publications for which he is solely responsible. However, Rose has confirmed that many of his views can be discerned in H.M.I. Reports - for example, *Education in England 1990-91*, the Annual Report of H.M. Senior Chief Inspector of Schools which was published in January 1992, in the same month as the Discussion Paper. The section on primary education echoes many of the issues and findings which appear in *The Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools Discussion Paper*. There is a concern over standards and over gaps in the subject expertise of primary teachers, especially at Key Stage 2, "who may be fast reaching the limits of their expertise and may be unable to teach the full nine-subject National Curriculum and Religious Education in sufficient

depth". The Annual Report also registers concern about "ill-planned and diffuse topic approaches". In relation to class management the use of varied methods of "adequate instruction and guidance" and of "balance between whole class, small group and individual teaching" were advocated.

The Annual Report also drew attention to the general dearth of non-contact time for class-teachers and the lack of opportunities for curriculum co-ordinators to work alongside their colleagues. There was also concern over the widespread deployment of the generalist class-teacher and the need to consider other possibilities was recommended. It was also asserted that the structure and content of primary teacher training courses should be reviewed as to their effectiveness. Thus, Rose and his H.M.I. colleagues had identified many of the major issues with which the 'three wise men' would grapple.

Woodhead

Mr Christopher Woodhead became Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council in October 1991. He had been appointed to the N.C.C. as Deputy Chief Executive in December 1990 and had served as Acting Chief Executive since August 1991. At the time of the commission he had experience of the work of the N.C.C. and its role as an agency of government. The N.C.C. (1991) published a press release in which it announced Woodhead's appointment "which follows an open competition which attracted a large number of high-quality candidates from across the country". Woodhead's promotion after ten months at the N.C.C. confirms that his work and approach had won the approval of the Secretary of State.

Woodhead taught English in Secondary schools before taking up a lecturing post in Education at Oxford University in 1977. In 1982 he moved to Local Education Authority work serving as Chief Adviser in Shropshire and Deputy Chief Education Officer in Devon, and then Cornwall, before joining N.C.C.

N.C.C. had been restructured. On July 10th, 1991, the Secretary of State, Clarke, had announced that he intended to separate the posts of Chairman and Chief Executive after

Mr Duncan Graham took early retirement. Mr David Pascall had been appointed part-time Chairman on August 19th and the post of Chief Executive was widely advertised. The *N.C.C. Corporate Plan 1992-1995*, which was published in December 1991, gives some evidence of the context in which Woodhead worked. The National Curriculum Council's mission was "to ensure that the curriculum in maintained schools raises standards and prepares pupils for adult life". Its role is defined as providing "the Secretary of State with authoritative, timely and independent advice on all aspects of the curriculum and in developing an appropriate and effective role in supporting implementation in the classroom". The Corporate Plan in its section on primary education identifies "pressing issues and several questions". These include "which are the best ways to manage and organise the National Curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2?" and "Traditionally primary school pupils have been taught by class-teachers. Does the weight of the subject orders, particularly at Key Stage 2, raise questions about this approach and point to the need for more specialist teaching and/or teachers? How can it be ensured that primary teachers have adequate knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the National Curriculum?" Finally, the Corporate Plan stated that "The National Curriculum has meant new and more rigorous demands in each subject. It is unclear whether models of curriculum organisation based solely on topic work and current approaches to classroom management can be successfully adapted to meet all these new demands". The N.C.C.'s Corporate Plan identifies some of the central issues which are addressed in *The Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools Discussion Paper*.

These extracts from the *N.C.C. Corporate Plan 1992-95* give some indications of Woodhead's views since he was involved in preparing it. The interview with Woodhead (1992) also provides another source for his views. During the interview he asserted the necessity of improving standards but these were not defined.. He was critical of what he termed "unthinking teachers" and "mediocrity". He condemned 'child centred notions' - particularly first hand experience - which he hoped would be eradicated because he believed they were contributing to ineffective learning.

Woodhead also outlined his views on the role of the N.C.C. including the consultation exercise it was undertaking with teachers to assess the manageability of the National Curriculum which involved not only the content, but also the methodology, in the classroom. It was clear that he viewed the N.C.C. as a growing force in education - particularly with the development of Grant Maintained Status and the weakening of the power and influence of Local Authorities.

The selection of the authors

The selection of the three was, in many ways, predictable. It was not at all surprising that the Secretary of State should invite Chief Primary H.M.I., Rose, to be a member. He was the most senior and experienced H.M.I. with a primary teaching background and wide experience of the primary sector. Moreover, H.M.I. had drawn attention, in successive reports, to uneven standards and low expectations in some primary schools of which Clarke was critical. In this context it is significant that the only reported statement from Rose at the press launch of the Discussion Paper on January 22 1992 was "It's the variation in standards we are suffering from. It's essentially a problem of mediocrity".

In its leader on January 24 1992, *The Times Educational Supplement* asserted that Alexander "was an obvious choice for the enquiry team". It was Alexander's Leeds Report in the summer of 1991 which brought him into national prominence. This report had found that although the Leeds' Education Authority had invested heavily in staff, buildings and equipment, expectations and results had remained relatively low. More significantly, the Report had also identified several practices associated with 'progressivism' and the Plowden Report which caught the interest of government ministers. How far the findings of the Leeds Report were general across the country was a key question. Clarke seems to have assumed that Alexander's views, as demonstrated in the Leeds Report, made him an acceptable member of the team. Alexander in his interview outlined both the stages of governmental interest and his developing involvement in the Autumn of 1991. He was surprised by the debate generated by the Leeds' Report after the press release in August. Michael Fallon signalled governmental

interest in primary education at the annual N.A.H.T. conference in October. Alexander was invited to participate in a D.E.S. seminar in the same month at which both ministers, Fallon and Eggar, were present. He reports that the next stage of his involvement was an invitation from Rose "to write a government sponsored paper on primary education". Stephen Bates (1992), the Educational Correspondent of *The Guardian* confirms this interpretation of events by suggesting that Alexander's Leeds' Report "roused ministers' interest" and "gave ministers the courage to tackle the primary problem head on". Bates also asserted that the fact that Alexander "had spent 27 years researching the primary sector won him a place on the inquiry". Indeed, Bates concludes, perhaps rashly, that "Alexander may become the Plowden of the nineties".

Alexander in his interview reports that Rose and he had met on two occasions to begin preliminary work on the Discussion Paper where they received an invitation to a meeting in November with Clarke and Eggar. Clarke made it clear that he regarded the 'report' as a major government initiative. He also stated that he had invited Woodhead to be a member of the team. This decision, according to Alexander, transformed the nature of the initiative from his point of view. As we have seen, Woodhead had recently been appointed by Clarke to be the Chief Executive of the N.C.C. Clarke was well aware, as he demonstrates in his speech of December 3, that the implementation of the National Curriculum had placed new demands on teachers' specialist knowledge and teaching styles. He obviously believed it appropriate, in this context, to invite Woodhead of the National Curriculum Council to participate. Rose (1993) confirms that it was fitting that a representative from the N.C.C. should be involved since N.C.C. was making a significant contribution to the primary debate at this time. Moreover, N.C.C. was an agency of government.

The team had been selected. Two were relatively close to government, although each in rather different ways. Alexander, the academic, as he stated in his address to Buckinghamshire headteachers on April 3 1992, was the self-confessed "outsider". Bennett (1992) characterised Alexander as "the one author not muzzled by government

employment". Very little evidence of documented criticism of Clarke's choice of the three before the Discussion Paper was published can be discovered. Informally, in some quarters and in different degrees, some criticisms were voiced during the Christmas and new year period. Some were critical that the team was entirely male, especially since 80 per cent of primary teachers are female (DFE statistics, 1988). There was concern that only one of the three had been a primary headteacher. There were some misgivings relating to Woodhead's lack of primary teaching experience. Woodhead, perhaps sensing this was quoted in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 13.12.91 as saying "I base my thoughts and feelings about primary education in the last ten years as a Local Authority adviser and officer".

The time-scale

Parekh (1992) in 'The Hermeneutics of the Swann Report' offers a useful framework for interpreting issues involved in the preparation of government reports. For example he suggests that the time a committee has at its disposal to do its work is significant. It is certainly true that the time-scale for the preparation of the Discussion Paper was very short compared with most government reports. Rose (1993) confirms that Clarke set the authors a deadline. The Discussion Paper was to be concluded at the latest by the end of January 1992. It is clear from the interviews with Woodhead (1992) and Alexander (1993) that the Secretary of State required a speedy response. To some extent events had followed the theory of Parekh (1992 p.93) that "committees of enquiry do not spring up in a vacuum. They are set up when a problem has agitated the community for some time and has been a subject of public debate". However, in this case the government had played a crucial role - not only by deciding to mount a primary initiative during the Autumn of 1991 but also by actively shaping public opinion. By December 1991 Clarke seemed to have his sights on an impending General Election and it seems likely that he wanted the Government's primary initiative to produce something quickly. In the event the authors prepared the Discussion Paper in seven weeks. This time-scale aroused

criticism in some quarters. For example, McAvoy (1992) of the N.U.T. at the press launch asserted that the Discussion paper had been "rushed".

The terms of reference

The limitations on a committee imposed by its terms of reference have been highlighted by Parekh. He argues that terms of reference are "its course of legitimacy, its birth certificate and it cannot go beyond them without discrediting itself" and "a genetic profile predicting the story of its life" (Parekh 1992, p.93). It can be argued that Clarke knew what he wanted and rather than commissioning a committee of enquiry he was instituting a drafting agency.

The introduction to the Discussion Paper describes the brief. The authors were requested "to review available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools" and "to make recommendations about curriculum organisation, teaching methods and classroom practice appropriate for the successful implementation of the National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 2". As we have seen the statement made by the Secretary of State on December 3 1991 stressed that "questions about how to teach are not for the Government to determine". The Discussion Paper went on to outline Clarke's wish "to initiate a discussion, not to impose solutions" and invited "every primary head-teacher and every primary classroom teacher to join in the radical rethinking now needed as to how best to teach children in our schools". The authors assert that their "report" attempts "to respond to the remit and to provide a basis for the debate which the Secretary of State wishes to promote". The terms of reference, together with the constraint of time, had certain consequences. The authors were to focus on organisation and methodology not on curriculum content. Rose confirmed in a telephone conversation that there was never any serious possibility of the authors visiting schools. They concentrated on using their collective knowledge and experience of primary education. Clarke was reported by *The Daily Telegraph* (23.1.92.) as saying that the three had been asked "to distil their lifetime's experience". The brief also requested them to review the evidence but did not require them to provide new evidence. These procedures, based on their remit, later drew

criticism from McAvoy who was reported in *The Daily Mail* (23.1.92.) as saying the 'report' was "based on the experience of just three people rather than direct evidence from talking to teachers and visiting schools"

More seriously the remit confined the authors' attention largely to the age range 7 to 11 (Key Stage 2). There was criticism of this. For example, Elfer (1992) argued that the Discussion Paper neglects the needs of the under-fives while David, Curtis and Siraj-Blatchford (1992) - dubbed the 'three wise women of Warwick' - challenged the Discussion Paper by suggesting that the experience and needs of the youngest pupils had been neglected, essential evidence about early years schooling had not been included, and research evidence can be marshalled to come to very different conclusions than those of Alexander, Rose and Woodhead.

The terms of reference, however, had their most significant influence in respect of the National Curriculum. The authors, in strict accordance with their brief, seem to have assumed the continuance of the National Curriculum in the form it was in January 1992 and addressed the issues of curriculum organisation and classroom practice on that assumption. Alexander in his interview confirms that the National Curriculum was a 'given' but stressed that the authors recommend that the National Curriculum is kept under "review". Simon (1992 p.91) argues that the authors seem to accept the National Curriculum as "tablets of the law".

Richards in his interview contends that the "brief was flawed". He asserted that "the key issue for teachers is the manageability of the National Curriculum" and that the Discussion Paper does not address this in depth. In this context he suggests that "the issues raised in the Discussion Paper are important but are of a secondary nature" and is also critical of the timing of the Paper. He argues that "the debate over pedagogy (in schools) is being over-shadowed by the range of demands of the National Curriculum" and that "the National Curriculum needs to be rendered manageable, then a debate of teaching strategies could be more realistically undertaken".

The scale of National Curriculum requirements are immense. They involve teachers of children at Key Stage 2 in planning, transacting and assessing a curriculum which comprises over 30 Attainment Targets, over 400 statements of attainment and over 50 pages of programmes of study. Moreover, the statutory orders are structured in a variety of different ways with attainment targets and programmes of study presented in a variety of formats. In addition, religious education is another statutory requirement and there are also cross curricular issues to be considered.

In this context it may be doubted that any combination of generalist and semi-specialist or specialist teaching in Key Stage 2 could realistically meet these requirements. They might be met by fully specialist teaching or by a combination of semi-specialist and specialist teaching towards the top of Key Stage 2 but in the foreseeable future primary schools are unlikely to be financed or staffed so as to make possible these patterns of deployment, even assuming that such patterns are desirable, which is a questionable assumption.

The terms of reference as they related to the National Curriculum resulted in the authors side-stepping the manageability issue. This might have delayed a fundamental reconstitution of the National Curriculum. However, since the publication of the Discussion Paper more research evidence has become available, the N.C.C. has conducted its manageability of the National Curriculum consultation with teachers and H.M.I. have undertaken inspections of schools. The fruits of this work were published by OFSTED (1993) and by the National Curriculum Council (1993) which confirmed that the manageability issue had at last been addressed.

The terms of reference may also have contributed to some confusion, at the time of its publication, concerning its status. Although it was usually described as a Discussion Paper, sometimes it was called a 'report' and, indeed, the term 'recommendations' appeared in the brief. In the interviews with Alexander (1993) and the telephone conversation with Rose (1993) both stressed they were clear from the outset that they were preparing a **Discussion Paper** (my emphasis). However, Richards in his interview

suggested that Woodhead seemed to regard it as a report and an article in *The Guardian* by Woodhead, published in February 1992, bears this out - "we wrote our report on primary education...". On the other hand Alexander in his interview asserted that it was a condition of his acceptance of the commission that a document with the status of a discussion paper was to be prepared and would be made widely available to teachers. Thus Parekh's view that the terms of reference "partially predetermine the character and content of the report" was accurate (Parekh 1992, p.93).

The writing process

The writing process will be interpreted now some of the views, values and aspirations which each of the three educationalists brought to the table have been considered.

Parekh's work will be used as a basis for exploring aspects of the writing process of the 20,000 word *The Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: Discussion Paper*.

Parekh (1992) has drawn attention to the significance of 'interest groups' in the process of preparing reports. Rose in his telephone conversation testifies to the "differing perspectives" of the three. The three were representatives of institutions or areas of interest which had contributed significantly to the primary debate. As we have seen the Leeds Report, the N.C.C. Corporate Plan and successive H.M.I. reports, including *The Annual Report of H.M. Senior Chief Inspector of Schools for 1990-91* had all addressed issues and concerns relating to the primary sector. Rose and Woodhead were both associated with government. Although H.M. Inspectorate has a certain independence, as has been shown, it was linked to the D.E.S. and, therefore, to Government. Rose, as a Senior Inspector, was working within this culture although he was, perhaps, less than secure as H.M. Inspectorate was under review at this time. Woodhead represented the N.C.C. which is an agency of Government. He had been appointed by the Secretary of State and recently confirmed in the post of Chief Executive. The N.C.C. had not long been established. Woodhead in his interview was highly critical of L.E.A.s and predicted their further reduction in power with no regrets. He viewed this vacuum as presenting

opportunities for the N.C.C. It seems clear from the interview with Woodhead that he was determined to ensure that the N.C.C. programme relating to the primary sector should be reflected in the Discussion Paper. In particular, there was criticism of many current primary practices and a forthright condemnation of mediocrity. Like Rose, he was concerned about standards. It was also clear from the interview that Woodhead was anxious to promote the N.C.C. and 'colonise' the 'how' as well as the 'what' of primary teaching, particularly through the national consultation with teachers which the N.C.C. organised on the manageability of the National Curriculum.. His participation in the preparation of the Discussion Paper gave him an opportunity. He negotiated from a position of strength and confidence.

Alexander, on the other hand, was the academic. He represented the academic perspective, if not the academic community. He had subjected the primary sector to detailed scrutiny. His interview in 1993 demonstrates that his natural inclination is to be guided by approaches which are the stock-in-trade of most academics. He employs an exploratory approach based on asking questions, assembling evidence and forming tentative and provisional conclusions which take into account the complexities inherent in an issue.

Alexander (1993) made it clear that he was determined to make a contribution to primary education which he believed had been neglected hitherto. Yet he was aware he was an academic entering the political arena. Alexander (1992 and 1993) had discovered, to his cost, that many of the interpretations of his Leeds' Report - particularly in the press - had been grossly distorted. Alexander's position in the team was the most unsure. There were paradoxes in his position. One of his major convictions was that primary teachers should participate in a professional debate yet aspects of his critique of primary education, including his criticism of some classroom practices, had alienated some teachers. He admitted in his article in *The Guardian* of 11.2.92. that he had found it "uncomfortable to be branded as an arch-enemy of progressivism one day and muddled academic the next". He also had to take into account his credibility in the academic

community. Alexander in his interview reported that he realised that some of his academic colleagues might be suspicious or hostile of his involvement in a 'report' commissioned by a Secretary of State who had made his views on primary education very clear in advance. Alexander (1993) was also well aware that his Leeds' Report had been misinterpreted by Clarke and the Government as an outright condemnation of practices in primary schools. Moreover, he asserted that his political convictions were far removed from those of the Government at this time. All this placed him in an uncomfortable position and why he agreed to accept the commission at all may be questioned. He was entering the political arena of which he had little experience. His academic credibility was not only threatened by having to work in a less than 'open' situation with a very restricted time-scale but also by an ambiguity in his position - was he a 'liberal' academic or a committed opponent of 'progressivism'? Moreover, there was considerable hostility to the "academic establishment" from the government, yet here was a distinguished academic who had accepted a government commission.

Thus the three educationalists brought their membership of 'interest groups' to the table as well as their personalities and their personal and professional views and values. They differed from most other Government committees in the respect that instead of a membership of between ten and twenty there were only three. A possible implication of this is that the fewer the 'interest groups' the more difficult it is to compromise.

The agreed process adopted to write the Discussion Paper was outlined by Alexander in his interview. He reported that he drafted sections II, IV, VI, VII and IX of the Discussion Paper. Rose was responsible for Sections III and VIII. (Richards in his interview, asserted that he drafted section VIII on the role of the headteacher for Rose) and Woodhead's hand was on I, V and X. As each section was drafted, comments were made to its author for consideration, and a final version was prepared for acceptance by all three.

There were differing recollections of the writing process. For example, Rose in his telephone conversation pronounced the experience "exhilarating but very hard work" and

reported that "there was no more edge to the proceedings than might be expected in the circumstances". On the other hand, the interviews with Alexander and, to a lesser extent, with Woodhead suggested that there was considerable tension between Woodhead and Alexander. Alexander, for example, stated that it was "a battle from the start" and, on occasions the discussion became "vicious". He recalled that Woodhead saw his role as mainly commenting on, and modifying, what he (Alexander) and, to a lesser degree, what Rose had written. Woodhead, according to Alexander, did not write a great deal himself. Woodhead in his interview also indicated that, at times, the atmosphere was "highly charged", particularly over the issue of teacher training.

Parekh (1992 p.94) has argued that "no committee is ever immune to the struggle for ideological domination" There is evidence of tension, even hostility, between Alexander and Woodhead, presumably related to their personalities and values and to the interest groups they represented. For example, Alexander in his interview stated that Woodhead was "impatient of qualified statements". Alexander also stated that the "more offensive and prescriptive words or phrases", for example "teachers will need to abandon the dogma of recent decades", had been inserted by Woodhead. Alexander asserted that he had "won on the substance of the Discussion Paper" but had "lost" on its style and tone. Meanwhile, in his interview, Woodhead insisted that his intention in the Discussion Paper had been "to challenge, to stimulate and to provoke" and "if this gave offence, so be it". It appears that Alexander and Woodhead had differing perceptions of teachers. Alexander seems to view them as autonomous professional colleagues, whereas Woodhead sees them as technicians to be directed. In this sense Woodhead and Alexander may represent the personal interface of intensification and the struggle between government control and personal and professional agency.

Alexander in his interview expressed some concern relating to the academic credibility of the Discussion Paper. Parekh suggests that "reports" of government committees are "not scholarly academic compositions" although they are usually "based on the available research". Alexander in his interview expressed unease at the decision not to adopt the

usual academic style of referencing but simply to list the 'main sources consulted' at the back of the Discussion Paper. For example, Dadds (1992 p.131) comments "None of the evidence used is referenced in the text, making it difficult to check the reliability, validity and generalisability of the research that, one is led to believe, underpins many of the assertions and certainties offered". It is apparent that the authors made few direct links between their claims and the specific evidence on which they were based. This rendered the Discussion Paper immediately suspect to academics and helped to open it up to their criticism.

The assertions in the Discussion Paper on standards in primary schools have been criticised by Richards in his interview and by Hammersley and Scarth (1993). For example, Richards believes that "the Paper makes too much of shaky evidence of downward trends in important aspects of literacy and numeracy". He argues that "There is insufficient evidence to settle the question of whether standards generally, or in numeracy and literacy in particular, have risen or fallen in recent years. It is far from clear, anyway, what would constitute adequate evidence to settle such a complex, value-laden and emotive issue". Hammersley and Scarth (pp.492-5) argue that the authors themselves describe their data on primary pupils' achievement as "inadequate" and "insufficient" and concede that the evidence is "not good enough to provide a foundation for conclusions about trends in achievement, one way or another". Alexander in his interview admitted that "unsubstantiated claims were made over standards" and "there should have been a softer conclusion", while Woodhead in his interview accepts that there was "no incontrovertible evidence of falling standards". Yet the conclusion of Section III of the Discussion Paper asserts that there is "some evidence of downward trends in important aspects of literacy and numeracy".

Other criticisms have been made concerning aspects of the use of evidence in the Discussion Paper. For example, Hammersley and Scarth contend that the authors argue that the alleged lack of pupil progress results from the commitment of some primary teachers to "highly questionable dogmas". Yet the authors do not demonstrate

convincingly that these dogmas are widespread. Hammersley and Scarth (1993 p.493) contend that "even if it could be shown that progressive beliefs were widespread among primary school teachers and were acted on by them and, even if it had been shown that a decline in children's achievement had taken place, we still could not conclude without further evidence that the first had caused the second". Hammersley and Scarth also draw attention to the authors' hope that their readers "can suspend their concern about overall levels of resources". They ask why should that possible cause for the alleged decline in standards be ruled out!

Richards in his interview commends the Discussion Paper for summarising the evidence from classroom research but is critical that it "treats it uncritically, imbues it with an authority it does not possess and suggests an almost complete concurrence with its conclusions". He also has misgivings about the manner in which the authors sometimes present their case. For example, the strengths of whole class teaching and subject teaching are identified but their weaknesses are not explored. The reverse happens with the issue of topic work. It is hardly surprising, in these circumstances, that Alexander should feel an unease relating to aspects of the academic credibility of the Discussion Paper. Scarth in an interview in 1992, for example, was very critical of Alexander's position - "He is an academic. He knows the name of the game. This 'report' would have absolutely no credence without a Professor of Education's name attached to it. The evidence base is scandalous for the claims that are being made". Dadds (1992 pp.140-4) has condemned the Discussion Paper's trenchant criticism of 'progressivism', which she argues has conferred enduring benefits - "offering unique insights into child development, stimulating half a century of research, liberating many children and teachers from pre-war practices, revitalising pedagogy, promoting experience, motivation, interest, control, independence, debate... and brought interest and admiration from the corners of the education world".

Although it is clear that there were tensions and disagreements during the writing process and Alexander had reservations about aspects of the tone, style and of the use of

evidence, it should not be overlooked that the authors had much in common. They were all experienced educationalists charged with a defined task with a tight schedule. No one resigned. There was agreement on many fundamental issues. They all accepted the need, for example, to emphasise the cognitive aspects of primary education. Later Simon (1992 p.92) commended this - "the historic importance of this report, it seems to me, is its strong insistence on intellectual, or cognitive, development as a crucial function of primary education". He endorses "The Vygotskian idea of teaching as intellectual challenge" which the three authors contrast "with Piagetian theories which depress expectations and discourage teacher intervention". There was also agreement among the three on the need to challenge the class-teacher system and to advocate a deployment of a broad repertoire of classroom practices based on the principle of "fitness for purpose".

Woodhead in his interview reported that the Discussion Paper was "something of a compromise". Parekh suggests that reports are "generally a compromise" and in the case of the Swann Report it was "a messy and yet skilfully judged compromise". Dadds (1992 p.131) asserts that "It is a document of mixed styles, mixed attitudes, mixed purposes, mixed textual devices and mixed logics" and "This mixing of styles and purposes has wrought contradictions and inconsistencies borne of the incompatible use of rationality and political rhetoric. These inconsistencies depress the professional credibility of the document". Parekh also contends that "a report is expected to reflect a consensus distilled from a dialogue between different points of view". In relation to the Discussion Paper this interpretation is more open to question as will be demonstrated later.

The immediate reaction to the Discussion Paper

Parekh (1992 p.100) has suggested that "a committee is a public body delivering a public report carrying the moral and political authority of a collective and quasi-official agency". The immediate reaction to the three authors and their Discussion Paper was indeed laudatory. During the Christmas and new year period, although there had not been any press leaks, there was speculation, especially in *The Times Educational Supplement*, about what "the three wise men" would produce. Their reception at the

press launch on January 22nd 1992 was commendatory. Clarke seemed satisfied with their work and introduced them as "the three wise men". However, he could not resist placing his own particular interpretation on the Discussion Paper - "This report now goes to teachers who, I think, will throw away a lot of the fashions of the last twenty years and know what they have to concentrate on is how to teach a sensible National Curriculum" (*The Daily Mail*, 23.2.92.), "It (the Discussion Paper) sets an agenda for rather dramatic change in primary schools, I'm glad to say particularly dramatic change in all those primary schools that are failing to deliver the results" (*The Daily Mail*, 23.2.92.) and "It (the 'report') will give teachers the self confidence to do what common sense tells them". Clarke also asserted at the press launch "I am glad no one has questioned their experience or expertise". Later in an article in *The Sunday Times* (26.1.92.) Clarke wrote of "The three wise men's erudite and lengthy report". Parekh's conviction that "if the report's recommendations fall within the government's range of expectations they are welcomed" had been borne out.

It was not only the Secretary of State who heaped laurels on the heads of the "three wise men". *The Daily Mail* (23.1.92.) dubbed them as "Britain's three leading primary education experts" and *The Times Educational Supplement* (24.1.92.) in a leader headed 'Words of Wisdom' asserts that the 'report' "confirms the wisdom of his (Clarke's) choice of experts". There is considerable evidence that Parekh's view that authors of reports can bask in initial public approval came to fruition. However, he argues that "the government's interpretation of it is decisive and final". In this case, Clarke regarded the Discussion Paper as acceptable and eventually it was distributed to primary schools with a commendation from him. A detailed analysis of the press reaction to the Discussion Paper will be undertaken in a later chapter.

A highly significant episode followed the press launch of the Discussion Paper. The two major disputants during the writing process - Alexander and Woodhead - each published an article in the Education section of *The Guardian* on February 11 1992. The articles 'Raise the standard bearers' (Woodhead) and 'Floodlights, fanfares and facile factors'

(Alexander), were printed side by side. A photograph of the three with a 'tear' separating Alexander from the other two appeared at the top of the page. Alexander in his interview confirmed that this photographic device was offensive and painful to him.

Each in his article seeks to clarify and to justify his position. They may have been influenced partly by the need to make their points of view clear after the interpretations certain sections of the press had put upon the Discussion Paper. As Parekh (1992 p.94-5) asserts "When it (a report) is published the kind of impact it makes depends on how the media present it. A committee wants its report to be read one way; the media may choose to read it very differently". Whatever their motivation the articles publicly demonstrate that Alexander and Woodhead differed over both the interpretation and status of the Discussion Paper. Woodhead insists that teachers should take note of the criticisms and recommendations in the 'report' and it should form "the basis of the specification" for the inspection of curriculum organisation and classroom management in primary schools. On the other hand Alexander claims that what was prepared was "a modest discussion paper" which had been misinterpreted - particularly by the press.

Although there are some similarities in their positions in the articles - both, for example, agree that 'progressivism' may not have been as prevalent as has been suggested and that the National Curriculum should be kept under review - the differences are marked.

Woodhead is assertive and uncompromising - "We need a new honesty, a determination to celebrate the strengths and, equally, to confront the weaknesses. Only then will standards rise". Alexander is exploratory and wants to encourage professional debate - "The set of propositions in the report's section six, offered for self-evaluation, training or staffroom discussion, but decidedly not as a checklist or specification of 'good practice' should prove helpful... This part of the debate, as we emphasise, belongs to the teachers themselves". These articles demonstrate clearly the differing views of Alexander and Woodhead with regard to the teaching profession.

Woodhead is critical of "unthinking mediocrity" and argues that teachers in mediocre schools would benefit from "an external review" and from pressure from parents and

governors. He criticised the "majority of L.E.A.s" for failing "to mount any systematic and regular review of school performance". His views may be interpreted as favourable to intensification. He envisages a major role for the N.C.C. in providing guidance to schools, and advice to the Secretary of State, relating to the implementation of the National Curriculum. He emphasises the role of schools, rather than training institutions, in the future training of teachers - "I feel that primary teachers are as capable as their secondary colleagues of training student teachers". A hostility to 'educationalists' in colleges and in higher education, generally, may be glimpsed in Woodhead's position. Later John Major was to say of the 'educational establishment' "They've had their say and they've had their day". Alexander, on the other hand, is critical of sections of the press which "refashioned it (the Discussion Paper) in their preferred image". He stresses the financial and professional support needed by teachers from both Local Authority and government - "Local and national policy makers can be no less immune from the reappraisal proposed by our report than can teachers". With regard to teacher training, he counsels careful consideration and is critical of those who "persist in pressing for the immediate imposition of a largely school-based apprentice model of primary training as if schools already had all the expertise and the new roles we envisage were already widely deployed". Reference to Section IX on teaching training in the Discussion Paper suggests that a compromise on these conflicting positions was effected.

Parekh (1992 p.94) maintains that "a report is expected to reflect a consensus distilled from a dialogue between different points of view". The articles in *The Guardian* suggest that there was only a partial consensus in respect of the Discussion Paper. For example, *The Guardian* (12.2.92.) in a leader headed "One rather unwise man" contends that "Professor Robin Alexander strives (in his article yesterday) to dilute the reports' criticisms of present teaching practices. This is not just muffling the message, but suffocating it". It concludes by exhorting Alexander to read "yesterday's accompanying feature by Chris Woodhead, another of the 'holy trio' who was much more frank about the weaknesses - as well as the strengths - of the present primary teaching force". *The Guardian* is usually regarded as a 'liberal' newspaper. The manner in which it handled

the Discussion Paper and Alexander illustrates the confusion of the period in which the Paper was written.

Conclusion

The Discussion Paper was, indeed, a compromise between the views and values of the three representatives from different 'interest groups'. Political considerations as well as educational issues played a part in the processes of negotiation involved in its preparation. It cannot be considered to be a complete consensus document since, as we have seen, two of its authors felt impelled to clarify and justify their respective positions and mediate the Discussion Paper with their particular interpretation. This public lack of harmony amongst the authors together with other factors like the strident climate of times with the possibility of an impending general election, the immediate media reaction, the concern in some quarters that "The Secretary of State had made up his mind" (Richards in his interview) and the release of the Paper to the public domain two weeks before it was distributed to schools, all contrived to obscure and to distort the meaning of the Discussion Paper. However, the Discussion paper heralded that primary education was now on the political agenda. It represented governmental interest and initiative in primary classroom practice, although Clarke asserted that his purpose was to foster debate rather than direct intervention.

Eventually each of the authors may tell his story of the origins, preparation, meaning and subsequent impact of the Discussion Paper. Meanwhile it has only been possible partially to reconstruct and to interpret the process. It is difficult to assess what effects it may have had on the authors and their careers. It appears that neither Rose nor Woodhead suffered from doubts or misgivings about their part in the process and the product. Their careers flourished following the publication of the Discussion Paper. Later in the year Rose was appointed to one of the most senior posts in the new OFSTED. Woodhead consolidated his position in the N.C.C. This institution undertook a consultative exercise with teachers on the manageability of the National Curriculum in 1992. As we have seen, Woodhead in his interview stressed that this consultation was considering classroom

practices as well as content relating to the implementation of the National Curriculum.

He was determined that the N.C.C. should be as much involved in the 'how' as well as the

'what' of teaching. Maybe the 'colonising' of pedagogy by the N.C.C. had been

legitimised, partly at least by Woodhead's position and experience as one of "the three

wise men". At the time of writing Woodhead is regarded by many, on the informal

educational grapevine, as the front runner for the Chief Officer post in the soon-to-be

amalgamated N.C.C./S.E.A.C. which will become the new School Curriculum and

Assessment Authority. He was later appointed to this post.

Alexander's position was more ambiguous and uneasy. An academic had entered the

political arena, had had his academic integrity questioned and had been subject to "trial

by tabloid". Although he claimed in a letter to *The Guardian* (14.2.92.) that there was no

split between himself and the other two authors, there does appear to be evidence of some

disharmony and disagreement. Alexander in his interview seemed to confirm this and

testified that he had suffered personal and professional turmoil from the experience.

Clarke had succeeded in involving a professor of education in his enterprise. This

involvement demonstrated the difficulties inherent in academic and political co-operation

as well as the political nature of educational reform.

Chapter 5: "Demagogy rather than debate". The reception of the Discussion Paper in the National Press

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the reception of the Discussion Paper in the national press following its press launch on January 22nd 1992. Woods (1977) has shown how the media plays a key role, not only in the dissemination but also in the shaping and legitimisation of knowledge. Those who control the media have the power to define what counts as information, and by their selection and treatment of news, create information.

Various recurring themes may be discerned in newspaper stories related to education in the last twenty years and particularly in respect of the present Discussion Paper. These themes are often reduced to caricature. They include the assumption frequently made without reference to evidence, that there is a decline in educational standards. The pervasiveness of progressive teaching methods is asserted. The 'educational establishment' including teachers, Local Authorities and their Advisers and College and University tutors, with few exceptions, is alleged to exert an unacceptable influence. The cure is simplistic and straightforward - a return to traditional methods largely based on chalk and talk and on subject teaching.

Usually only selected aspects of an event, a speech or a research study are reported. These conform with the stance of the newspaper. Strident and often simplistic headlines designed to trigger required responses are employed. Harland (1992) has noted "the press tendency to adopt aggressive headlines which frequently trivialise the debate to an attack on teachers", Cohen (1981) has propounded the concept of 'folk devils' and the process which leads to a 'moral panic' which may be defined as a contagious burst of popular outrage that risks losing sight of reality. It may not be too extravagant to suggest that, in the current context, sections of the press cast the 'educational establishment' in the role of 'folk devils' and tried to isolate the teaching profession by criticism designed to fuel public hostility.

Hartnett and Naish (1976) offered a series of sixteen indices said to be indicators of discourse which is ideological and less than fully rational. An examination of press articles in the light of their criteria reveals that most fall into the 'ideological' mode. One purpose of an ideological approach is to minimise the possibility of conflict and to persuade target groups to agree on policies and action. Clarity is not likely to have a high priority. As Hartnett and Naish (1976, p.99) asserted "... where claims are vacuous, vague, imprecise, ambiguous and generally unclear conflicts are likely to be minimised, and go unnoticed because the empirical and evaluative claims can be interpreted in a number of ways. Thus the possibility of an individual finding the claims acceptable is greater than if they were precisely stated".

There is a long history of educational stories which have received the kind of treatment identified above - particularly from the right wing press. Bennett's 1976 research study was a prime example. On the basis of questionnaires and cluster analysis on teaching styles sent to teachers in over 800 primary schools, the Lancaster research identified twelve teaching styles on an informal/formal continuum. The research was tentative in its conclusions and was at pains to point out that the twelve teaching styles were an oversimplification and, apart from the two extremes, most teachers exhibited elements of both formal and informal teaching styles. The twelve teaching styles were categorised into three groupings 'informal', 'formal' and 'mixed'. Pupils' scores in standardised tests of reading, English and arithmetic were used as a measure of teacher effectiveness. Bennett found that formal teaching produced better results than other styles in mathematics and English, and that 'formal' and 'mixed' did better than 'informal' styles in reading.

Although the Lancaster researchers in *The Times Educational Supplement* of May 21 1976 claimed that no one in the team had a primary interest in discovering whether 'progressive' methods in general were to be preferred to formal ones the press, on the whole, chose to depict the research as a definitive judgement and an endorsement of the efficacy of traditional methods. For example Dr. Rhodes Boyson in *The Guardian* of

April 26 1976 was reported as saying, that all parents should go to their children's primary schools to denounce any "progressive rubbish" they might find. He also commented that the Bennett research backed up his campaign for a return to traditional structured teaching.

Other examples of this type of press response were shown in the reaction to the H.M.I. Primary Survey (DES 1978) and, more recently, to the reading methods and standards furore in the Summer and Autumn of 1990. A further example was Alexander's Leeds' Report which was published in July 1991 and received extensive press coverage. The following headlines give some of its flavour:

'Progressive Teaching in schools was £14m failure' (*The Daily Telegraph* 2.8.91)

'A generation of wasted time ... The education of millions of primary school children, has been blighted in the name of an anarchic ideology says a new study' (*The Daily Telegraph* 19.9.91)

'Leeds £14m Project fails to improve teaching' (*The Guardian* 3.8.91).

'Very peculiar practice for state schools ... found out at last. (*The Mail on Sunday* 4.8.91)

Alexander (1992 pp.164-6) clearly bruised by the press treatment of him and of the Leeds Report, characterised the press reaction, as "trial by tabloid". He has argued that the Leeds Report related to one particular Local Authority but was viewed in the press as though it represented the national picture. Most newspaper articles sought in the main to portray the Leeds initiative as an extravagant failure although the Report's main conclusion was that it was "an initiative well worth the Authority's investment" and twenty-two "positive and productive features" were noted in the Report. In summary Alexander argued that "a complex and carefully qualified analysis was reduced to simple pathology". As with Bennett fifteen years earlier there was a considerable discrepancy between what the research actually showed and how it was reported in the press. Moreover the repeated politicisation of educational research may have contributed to a generally defensive reaction from the teaching profession.

At the 1992 British Educational Research Association Conference, at Stirling, a speech by the president, Dr. Gipps, was reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* for September 18 1992 (p.17) in an article under the title 'Little comfort for derided researchers'. Dr. Gipps argued that instead of being valued by those in power, specialist knowledge had become the object of derision. Painstaking research had often been dismissed in favour of ill-informed 'common sense' and knee-jerk responses to media scares about falling standards. When research was published it was often mis-reported in the popular press. She claimed that relationships between researchers and ministers had become increasingly sour and educationists had been marginalised. She argued that the assumption that education was a black and white world in which problems could be solved merely by the application of a little 'common-sense' should be challenged. In conclusion she recommended that "We must re-double our efforts to expose the political pre-suppositions and assumptions of policy makers and join in the media debate".

A Chronology

January 22 1992	The press release of the Discussion Paper.
January 23 1992	The initial reaction in the national press.
January 24 1992	A brief leader and summary of the Discussion Paper in <i>The Times Educational Supplement</i> .
January 26 1992	<i>The Sunday Times</i> attack on the Plowden committee
February 10 1992	During this week schools received their copies of the Discussion Paper.
February 11 1992	Two articles by Woodhead and Alexander appeared in the Education section of <i>The Guardian</i> .

The immediate newspaper reaction to the Discussion Paper appeared on January 23 1992. Not all newspapers carried stories - for example *The Daily Mirror*. There were also articles in *The Times Educational Supplement* on Friday, January 24th and in *The Sunday Times* on January 26.

Although there were some differences between the 'popular' and 'quality' newspapers certain common features in the stories may be discerned. These include a selective approach which often decontextualised and ignored what the Discussion Paper actually said. Frequently the stories involved generalising from the particular, using words and phraseology persuasively and offering simple and speedy solutions to complex issues. Thus a distorted picture was created. Headlines were selected to stir up feelings. The denunciation and ridicule of opposition was employed from an adversarial standpoint. On the other hand the ideology of the majority of the newspapers was celebrated as

'common sense'. Finally there is evidence of an appeal to higher authority in the office of the Secretary of State. These specific strategies will be analysed in turn.

The stories were frequently selective and decontextualised and ignored what was actually written in the Discussion Paper. *The Daily Express* exemplified the tabloid approach by comments like "Kenneth Clarke yesterday gave the go-ahead for the biggest shake-up in junior education since the war by putting the Three Rs back on top of the curriculum". The Discussion Paper's recommendation for balance between whole class teaching and group work, topics and subjects was characterised as "OUT will go the Playschool atmosphere in many schools where teachers help children individually learn at their own pace. IN comes a challenging new approach with the emphasis on youngsters being taught specific subjects as a whole class by specialist teachers".

Meanwhile *The Daily Mail* published a rather more balanced story in less space. Once again the demand for a return to the basics - reading, writing and arithmetic - was prominent. There was little reference to the Discussion Paper. The journalists in the popular newspapers seemed to be so convinced that 'back to basics' was what the Secretary of State wanted and hence what the enquiry team would deliver that an examination of what the Discussion Paper actually said was, perhaps, considered superfluous,

The treatment of the story was different, to a certain extent, in the so-called quality press on January 23. For example Stephen Bates in *The Guardian* presented a more judicious article. Constant reference was made to what the Discussion Paper said and extensive quotations were employed. The leader comment in the same newspaper argued that the Discussion Paper 'represented a pragmatic package well within the grasp of the present system' and suggested that "it would not restore rote learning and regimentation in primaries. There will be plenty of scope for imagination and creativity". This leader, alone among the quality newspapers, accurately pointed out one of the central issues of the Discussion Paper. In relation to the generalist class teacher system and the demands of the National Curriculum it commented "No one can expect teachers to have such :

breadth and depth. Class teachers, were adopted in the Nineteenth Century as a cheap and efficient solution. Now we are about to enter the twenty-first century, it is time to move on". However, the judicious tone of *The Guardian* article was impaired by the accompanying photograph which showed children in a classroom sitting in rows of desks with the caption "Back to basics ... whole class teaching of single subjects is favoured in the report to Kenneth Clarke on primary school methods above topic work".

A *Daily Telegraph* article also made some reference to the Discussion Paper. For example the disparity of funding between the primary and secondary sectors outlined in the Discussion Paper was given due emphasis. *The Times* reported with accuracy on a central aspect of the Discussion Paper. "While attacking the 'highly questionable dogmas' adopted by some [my emphasis] primary schools for the past 20 years the three education specialists appointed by Mr. Clarke ... have refused to endorse a wholesale return to traditional teaching methods" and "They have recommended that the best of all practices should be incorporated in primary school teaching but have fallen short of countermining Lady Plowden's 1967 report which has been blamed by Mr. Clarke for the introduction of child-centred education and disorganised lessons ..." On the other hand *The Independent* took a different line in its leader beginning with a quotation from the Discussion Paper - "We see the need to encourage a new kind of debate about primary education, but we also wish to distance ourselves as firmly from mindless iconoclasm as from mindless orthodoxy".

Generally the articles in the quality press exhibited some significant differences from the tabloids. Most articles tended to focus rather more on the Discussion Paper itself and on the issues it raised. Quotations from it were employed. Short biographies of the three authors were included. The style was usually more explanatory and sometimes the summaries were a more accurate reflection of the Discussion Paper. For example *The Guardian* article commented accurately "It (the Discussion Paper) also suggests that schools should consider grouping pupils by ability for particular lessons although it rejects the idea of streaming for the whole of their school life as too crude".

Nevertheless, the press coverage resulted in the distortion of the Discussion Paper recommendations. Often emphasis was placed on 'quotable quotes' from the Secretary of State and to a lesser extent, from the authors. There was a limited analysis of the Discussion Paper itself and Education Correspondents found it difficult to summarise the Discussion Paper adequately. This may have been due to a lack of space. More likely the issues raised in the Discussion Paper are complex and many of the recommendations were propositional and did not admit of easy précis. Thus selective approaches and decontextualisation were notable features in the newspapers.

A further strategy used was to generalise from the particular. Sweeping statements were employed which not only distorted what was written in the Discussion Paper but also were designed to carry the conviction of self-evident truths. Persuasive language was used. This strategy was exemplified in *The Daily Express* - "Education Secretary calls for teachers to get back to basics" and "Mr. Clarke acted after giving first official confirmation of an alarming fall in reading, writing and arithmetic standards. It has prompted his demand for a return to old-fashioned lessons where teachers address the whole class". Readers of *The Daily Telegraph* might have been forgiven for believing that the Discussion Paper had rejected all post-Plowden practice "In a historic report designed to roll back the tide of progressive education, the 'three wise men' ... said ill-conceived practices introduced after the Plowden report 25 years ago had been accompanied by declining standards of literacy and numeracy, and unacceptable variations in teaching quality." This viewpoint was re-inforced in the leader which stated that the Discussion Paper "draws a thick black line under the post-Plowden experiment in progressive education whose chief legacy has been an almost unprecedented decline in children's literacy and numeracy".

Headlines have always played a significant part in press stories. Those employed in the Discussion Paper stories on January 23 were designed to catch the eye and to mobilise immediate interest and concurrence. The headlines all implied action - something was going to happen. For example, 'Schools face 3Rs shake-up' (*The Daily Express*) and

'Three Wise Men shake up schools' (*The Daily Mail*). Emphasis was sometimes given to the Secretary of State - 'Clarke backs calls for 'common sense' primary teaching' (*The Times*). Predictably the *The Daily Telegraph* carried the heading 'Call for return to traditional school lessons' while *The Guardian* had 'Teachers told to re-think methods'. The headlines all employed short words and simple, direct language. The Discussion Paper raised complex issues which were not readily encapsulated in a short sentence. The headlines often tended towards half truths.

A further strategy adopted by the press was to denounce and ridicule the 'opposition'. This was adversarial and was directed at teachers generally, those who train and advise them and, in particular, at Lady Plowden and her report. For example *The Daily Express* commented that the Education Secretary "denounces the foolish methods that often lead to poor results" and "Mr. Clarke aims to change the child-centred techniques backed by Lady Plowden in her 1967 Report" which "swept through classrooms, in the sixties and still prevail in most of them". Clarke was also reported as criticising "silly practices". Meanwhile, in a telling phrase *The Guardian* commented that the "report **blames** teachers ..." (my emphasis). *The Daily Telegraph* claimed that "They [the three authors] condemned theories based on the work of Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist, which had led to fixed notions of when children were ready to learn, which lowered expectations and discouraged teacher intervention".

On January 26 *The Sunday Times* carried two articles relating to the Discussion Paper. There was a full page focus report entitled 'The Great Betrayal'. It claimed "Former members of the Plowden committee were still making excuses as the damage their work did to generations of school children was laid bare by one official inquiry last week". The technique of quote and counterquote in which the responses of committee members were characterised as "excuses" was used to damn them and the Plowden report. Sir Rhodes Boyson was quoted as saying "Plowden destroyed the academic opportunities of two, if not three, generations of children". This article was the prime example of what Simon (1992 p91) has asserted was "an unscrupulous media attack on Lady Plowden and

her colleagues". It amounted to a character assassination of Lady Plowden and a denunciation of her 1967 report.

The second article by the Secretary of State was entitled 'Education's insane band wagon finally goes into the ditch'. He asserted that "It [the Discussion Paper] says to the latter - day, left wing apostles of Plowden the equivalent of 'the emperor has no clothes' and until recently, if anyone criticised these 'highly questionable dogmas' they would be exposed to ridicule and vitriolic attack by sections of the education world". The 'folk devils' had been identified!!

Generally the press depicted their own stance as being based on 'common sense'. It appeared that at the press launch on January 22 both the Secretary of State and Alexander also appealed to 'common sense' in statements. Clarke for example was quoted in *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* as claiming that the Discussion Paper "would give teachers the self confidence to do what their common sense tells them". In *The Daily Mail* Alexander was quoted as saying "We are arguing for a return to common sense". This appeal to the principle of common sense was catching. *The Times* headline, as we have seen, was 'Clarke backs calls for common sense primary teaching'. The Secretary of State in his *Sunday Times* article asserted that "It [the Discussion Paper] sets out what **we all know** to be common sense" (my emphasis). The readers of the press could be forgiven for assuming that a dash of 'common sense' together with a return to traditional methods in the classroom would be an effective cure for most educational ills. The impression was given of truth, founded on common sense, triumphing over an ideology.

A further strategy was based on an appeal to higher authority - usually to the office of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State was projected as a minister who had successfully diagnosed the malaise in primary education. For example *The Daily Express* commented "Mr. Clarke acted after giving first official confirmation of an alarming fall in reading, writing and arithmetic standards". *The Times* story exhibited a tendency to view the Discussion Paper from the Secretary of State's perspective and, to some extent,

re-fashion it in what may have been assumed to be his preferred image. For example it commented "Mr. Clarke was pleased that the report stressed the need for specialist teaching in the National Curriculum subjects of mathematics, English, science, technology, history, geography, art and music". This was facile. It was at variance with what was written in Section VII (p.42-45) of the Discussion Paper. For example "Between specialist teaching and consultancy there is a middle position of semi-specialisation" and "We believe that an open minded consideration of these issues is likely to lead schools, circumstances permitting, to a combination of the four teaching roles we have identified (Generalist, Generalist/Consultant, Semi-Specialist and Specialist) with a tendency towards specialisation in the upper years of Key Stage 2 ...".

There was considerable emphasis on the Secretary of State in both the tabloid and 'quality' press. He was substantially quoted. The assumption seemed to be that having successfully discovered what was wrong with primary schools he would set about putting it right. For example the Secretary of State was quoted in *The Daily Express* as saying "This report now goes to teachers who, I think, will throw away a lot of the fashions of the last 20 years and see what they have to concentrate on is how to teach a sensible National Curriculum." Clarke returned to this theme in his article in *The Sunday Times*. "The ghost of pseudo-Plowden has been laid. Our schools will be in a much better position to raise their standards as a result". The assumption seemed to be that with robust common sense the Secretary of State would eradicate progressive methods. At times it almost seemed as though he were cast in the role of the saviour of the nation's children, by slaying the dragon of 'progressivism'. However, *The Guardian* leader of January 23rd was rightly more cautious. "The Secretary of State cannot just pull a lever and expect every signal down the line to fall into place".

There were some significant developments in *The Guardian* of February 11. As we have seen, the Education Section carried articles by Woodhead - 'Raise the Standard Bearers' and Alexander - 'Floodlights, fanfares and facile factors' side by side, in which Alexander seemed to distance himself, to some extent, from the Discussion Paper. He was certainly

critical of its reaction in the press. On February 12 a leader in *The Guardian* launched an attack on Alexander under the heading 'One rather unwise man' Alexander was criticised for seeming to question the Discussion Paper's analysis of present teaching practices. The leader asserted "To write a report (the Leeds Report) and then deny its consequences is unfortunate. To write two, and deny them both, is unforgivable." Although this attack on Alexander was, perhaps, unexpected as it came from a newspaper which might have been supposed to be supportive of Alexander and his views some reasons for the conflict may be discerned. Stephen Bates' article in *The Guardian's* Education Section on January 28th was entitled 'Pall of paradox in the primary debate.' This article suggested that "a degree of confusion" at the launch of the discussion paper existed about the prevalence of "trendy methods" or "highly questionable dogmas". It continued by claiming that Alexander "reckoned that the teaching methods the report castigated were far less widespread than you imagine". Bates concluded "If this is the case the report was pretty sweeping in its criticisms of current practice. If they feel it has been misrepresented they have only themselves to blame for being so unequivocal."

Alexander responded on this particular issue in his article in *The Guardian* on the following Tuesday as we have seen. On February 14 *The Guardian* published a letter from Alexander in which he claimed there was no difference of opinion between himself and the other two authors. This episode has been analysed in detail as it may assist in putting the press reaction into some perspective. It could be argued that if the authors seemed to disagree on the interpretation of the Discussion Paper it was, perhaps, not surprising that most of the press presented a particular interpretation.

The press reaction to the public launch of the Discussion Paper on January 23 together with some subsequent developments until the middle of February have been analysed. Certain common strategies in the stories have been identified. Although some differences between coverage in the 'popular' and 'quality' have been noted many similarities have been outlined. On the whole complex issues were presented simply and speedy and simple solutions were offered. There was an adversarial tone. What was written in the Discussion Paper was often distorted or ignored. The headlines were designed to make

an immediate impact and to elicit a particular response. Considerable emphasis, especially in the tabloid newspapers, was placed on the views and actions of the Secretary of State. Educational standards were viewed as self-evidently low and/or falling and progressive classroom methods were to blame. Teachers, those who advise and train them, the 'educational establishment' and specifically Lady Plowden were cast in the role of 'folk devils' and were heavily criticized. A return to 'basics' was a prominent theme. The efficacy of whole class teaching with children sitting in rows of desks was advocated. Single subject teaching was urged at the expense of topics. This latter tendency was best exemplified in *The Daily Express* "The results of a top level inquiry ... called for an end to trendy teaching and a return to traditional methods of education". Simon (1992 p.96) has commented on the "deliberate misrepresentation that followed the report's publication in which demeaning activity the 'quality' press - in particular *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian* - excelled themselves". Injudicious distortions were not the sole preserve of the tabloids.

Virtually every paper employed the Discussion Paper's extremely quotable assertion that primary schools "will need to abandon the dogmas of recent decades" (185). No paper questioned the credibility of the three authors (until *The Guardian*/Alexander contretemps) although Woodhead's lack of primary teaching experience was noted in *The Guardian*. There was no criticism of the Discussion Paper and its recommendations. For example *The Times Educational Supplement* of January 24 carried a brief leader headed 'Words of Wisdom'. After commenting approvingly on the Discussion Paper and on the views and credentials of the 'Three Wise Men' it concluded "What matters now is how the recommendations are applied to the management of the primary curriculum and to teaching training to give the lift to standards everywhere that every one is seeking." There was no adverse comment in the press on the time scale in which the Discussion Paper was prepared. As has been shown most Education correspondents found it difficult to summarise the Discussion Paper.

The Discussion Paper was released to the press two weeks before publication. It did not begin to arrive in schools until the week beginning February 10th. The newspapers, together with the rest of the media, were able to fashion or refashion it in their preferred image. For example, Larr (1992) has asserted "Before many teachers have even had time to read the report, let alone discuss it with their colleagues, entrenched attitudes are being taken up and views are being polarised". Thus the public reception of the Discussion Paper was established before most teachers were able to read a copy. For instance a teacher reading *The Daily Express* on January 23 "Now a classroom revolution is set to sweep through 23,000 primary schools in England and Wales as the Education Secretary calls for teachers to get back to basics" had twenty days to wait before being able to read what the Discussion Paper actually recommended.

The press had a political purpose in the way in which the Discussion Paper was reported. Their purpose was to influence public opinion. Dadds (1992) has pointed out the strong link between the greater part of the press and the Government, particularly the programme and policies of the 'New Right'. In this period a Conservative administration was approaching a General Election after an unbroken spell in office of twelve years but with rather less confidence than it had displayed at similar times in 1983 and 1987. The government had recently experienced a traumatic change of leadership and ideological differences were being unleashed which had been generally restrained during the Thatcher administration. In contrast the Labour party was displaying a greater unity of purpose. As has been shown education featured prominently on the political agenda. A highly partisan press ensured that education issues were voiced and defined from the party political perspective. Education news was presented in simple and starkly adversarial terms. Alexander (1992) has commented on "a softening up purpose of marshalling and manipulating public opinion, isolating the professions in question, and creating a climate in which draconian measures seem to offer the only solution". The burden of the message from the sections of the press favourable to the Government, was that progressive teaching should be, and was to be, "outlawed". There was ample evidence of a build up of a "moral panic".

Simon (1992) has commented on the 'media hullabaloo and deliberate misrepresentation' which followed the launch of the Discussion Paper. J. W. P. Creber, of the School of Education in the University of Exeter, in a letter in *The Guardian* on January 25th lamented that "balanced judgements of complex matters remain obscured. Demagoguery (sic.) continues to triumph over pedagogy". In his article in *The Guardian* on February 11 Alexander commented "The debate so far has been polarised and simplistic, long on caricature and short on fact. We've had the phoney debate: let the real one now begin". The view of Parekh (1992 p.95) held much substance that when a government report is published "the kind of impact it makes depends on how the media present it. A committee wants its report to be read one way; the media may choose to read it differently. Since they have neither the time nor the capacity to appreciate the nuances of its arguments, they inevitably abstract and abridge it and simplify its thesis. They are also never ideologically and politically neutral, and their biases inevitably influence their interpretation of it. Often they not only simplify and vulgarise it but also alter its balance, draw dubious conclusions, distort its arguments, charter it in the service of dubious causes and destroy its integrity". Most sections of the press, together with the Secretary of State had contrived an inauspicious beginning to a reflective debate.

Chapter 6: The response of a Local Authority

The Context

Local authorities represent a link in the chain which connects a Governmental initiative at the centre with its eventual impact on headteachers and class teachers in schools in a locality. The manner in which the Discussion Paper impacted on local authorities and their responses, together with the ways in which they mediated it to their schools, are of considerable interest and variety. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the response of one Local Authority - Buckinghamshire - to the Discussion Paper for a period of one year from its publication on January 22 1992. Following a consideration of the county's motivation four main aspects of the county's response will be evaluated.

Brighouse (1993 p.18) argued that "L.E.A.s have lost one empire" but "could still win friends and influence people". The role played by Buckinghamshire LEA in mediating the *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools Discussion Paper* demonstrated some of the strengths and weaknesses of a local education authority in the early 1990s. Haigh (1992 p.4), an educational correspondent in an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* surveying the progress of the national debate relating to the Discussion Paper commented that "the Local Authority's role in putting the discussion paper on the agenda has been crucial". Various mediating processes adopted by Buckinghamshire will be scrutinised and the effectiveness or otherwise of these will be evaluated. This chapter will illustrate aspects of the changing role of a local education authority. Simon and Chitty (1993 p.35) have outlined the governmental measures which have reduced the powers of local authorities and concluded "The price of this diversity is the demise of the local education authorities..." Brighouse and Moon (1990), Morris (1993) and Cordingley and Kogan (1993) have speculated upon the future role of local authorities. For example, Morris (1993) predicts a future local education authority stance as "lean, mean and minimalist". Nevertheless the response of Buckinghamshire, perhaps, was to show, at least in part, that the LEA had a part to play in the 'new world'.

Methods and data

The data collected for this study was derived mainly from interviews and relevant documentation. Buckinghamshire's CEO, Stephen Sharp, was interviewed twice for approximately three quarters of an hour on each occasion in March and December 1992. Walter Eyles, a former officer of the county with an interest in the Discussion Paper, was interviewed in March. Two primary advisers - Cecile Povey and David Shepherd - were both interviewed also in March 1992. One of the primary advisers responsible for implementing the county's response to the Discussion Paper, Pauline Martin, was interviewed in April and May 1992 and January 1993. Primary headteachers, Trevor Dooks, Penny Joyce, Jean Morgan and Jeff Smith were interviewed at termly intervals during the year while John Scarth, headteacher of Alex Campbell Middle School, was interviewed in October 1992. The two headteachers seconded to co-ordinate the county's written response - Anne Hayes and Frank Schencks - were interviewed in April and September respectively. Most of these interviews were tape-recorded over three quarters of an hour, although some of those interviewed preferred me to make notes rather than use the tape-recorder. Informal conversations were undertaken with all these headteachers when the opportunity arose. Jenny Senior, Graham Marshall and Clive Wright, all members of the county's advisory service, also offered informal consultations. Most quotations in the following chapter are taken from these meetings.

I was given access to a considerable body of Buckinghamshire documentation including the C.E.O.'s *Annual Reports* of 1991 and 1992, circular letters from the C.E.O., officers and advisers to primary headteachers, material on the Age Weighted Pupil Unit Review and the county's publications *Achieving Quality in Primary Education* - a response by Buckinghamshire primary schools to the Chief Education Officer on the document 'Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools', Alexander, Rose and Woodhead 1992 and its synopsis.

I also attended the address of Professor Alexander to Buckinghamshire Primary headteachers in April 1992.

The county's motivation

There were many factors inherent in what came to be called the "county's primary initiative" in response to the Discussion Paper. The C.E.O., Stephen Sharp, played "a very active role" according to a member of the county's Advisory Team, Pauline Martin. Buckinghamshire's C.E.O. was well known for his interest in primary education. He was chairman of a national body - The Primary Education Study Group. Sharp, in an interview, spoke of a "commitment to primary education that comes from working with this Group". He had played a key role in securing resources for the primary sector in his own authority - for example, funding for a measure of non-contact time for primary class teachers and for enhanced resources for year 7 children. In addition, his wife is an experienced primary teacher. He was also supportive of the development of the National Primary Centre at Westminster College. In his *Second Annual Report*, (1992) the C.E.O., in a section entitled 'The primary education debate' stated the reasons for the county-led follow up to the Discussion Paper - "by studying its findings we could continue the search for further improvement and present the issues to parents and governing bodies".

The C.E.O. gave further evidence of his intentions in his interview of March 1992. He affirmed "I think we do need to have more resources in primary education". He stated that he had "a commitment to making sure that the L.E.A. plays a professionally leading role" and that the L.E.A. offered the "right blend of leadership by discussion and partnership". He reported that he and some fellow C.E.O.s had met Alexander and Rose while they were in the process of writing the Discussion Paper. They had "urged that there was a role for L.E.A.s in following up their conclusions" and Sharp expressed satisfaction that the concluding section of the Discussion Paper had, in his opinion, endorsed this view.

Buckinghamshire's C.E.O. also commented on the strength of the professional involvement of primary headteachers and classteachers in the county. He cited the county's primary initiative of 1987 as an example. A steering committee had produced a pamphlet after co-ordinating the products of eight working parties each consisting of:

primary headteachers, teachers, officers and advisers. The pamphlet (Bucks CC 1987) surveyed and celebrated various areas of primary practice in the county including 'the skills of the teacher', 'the learning environment', 'continuity and progression' and 'leadership in the curriculum'. Members of the Bucks Primary Group - sometimes known as the Bucks Primary Forum - had been involved in this publication. This influential group which had been involved in the Bucks CC Primary Initiative of 1987 continued its work in subsequent years. It provided a core of interested professionals - primary headteachers and officers and advisers - who would not only be willing to respond to a county initiative following the publication of the Discussion Paper of January 1992 but would actively seek one. Sharp made it clear that he was well aware of this interest and expectation which he determined to employ and to fulfil.

Sharp was also anxious to rectify media distortion by taking "opportunities to counteract the misleading information that some of the media put out. There is an organised campaign to denigrate some aspects of education and so, holding the ring, I think, gives a bit of motivation" (to the Local Authority). Haigh (1992 p.4) confirms this position. He contends that "The role of the Local Authority in 'selling' the document (Discussion Paper) was important... headteachers first learned of it through highly selective press reports, and it was with some relief that they learned from their inspectors and advisers - and later from the authors themselves - of its actual content and purpose".

Martin, a county adviser with specific responsibility for primary education, considering the county's motivation with regard to the Discussion Paper, stated that the county was "wanting to continue the spirit of professional debate" and should be "seen to be fulfilling a role and doing a job with strengths and capabilities that schools do not have". Another primary specialist adviser, Povey, confirmed this position when she said "I think it (the county debate on the Discussion Paper) definitely needs a direction and a steer". Eyles, a former officer with the county, asserted that the Local Authority is "an agency to make things happen on behalf of schools based on high level expertise" and an "L.E.A. should give a lead to justify its existence and use its resources and organisation to help schools".

Brighouse (1993 p.18) has argued that "In future L.E.A.s will have more impact by exercising influence, not flexing power". It was in the context of the weakening of L.E.A. power and the development of Grant Maintained Status that the Buckinghamshire C.E.O. and his officers and advisers launched "the primary initiative" in the county. Perhaps there was a political motive. If the county could be seen to be readily responding to a national debate and to local needs by mounting and co-ordinating a successful primary initiative this would maintain or enhance its status in the eyes of headteachers, governors and parents. This initiative may be divided into four areas - the response to the primary education debate before the Discussion Paper was commissioned, Professor Alexander's address to primary headteachers in the county in April 1992, the setting up of a consultative process and a support system to prepare a "detailed professional paper for the use of heads and their staffs with a synopsis for wider use" (Sharp) and an attempt to win enhanced funding for the primary sector.

The response in Buckinghamshire to the national primary education debate before January 1992.

Sharp (1991) sent a memorandum on November 11 to all officers and advisers alerting them to "attacks on primary education", for example, the "recent outspoken comments by Mr Fallon". He advised, in the "current controversy", that "professionals need to make calm and well justified comments". He stated that he had asked the Principal Adviser "to survey primary practice in Buckinghamshire in relation to teaching and learning styles together with an account of how individualised and group learning came to be widely used by primary teachers". He reported that he had written to the Chief HMI, Rose and to Professor Alexander for evidence and advice. Sharp reported that Alexander had been "appalled at the way politicians were using his research" and attached to his memorandum a summary of the *Primary Education in Leeds Report* to combat the misrepresentation. The C.E.O.'s memorandum concluded by recommending that Headteachers should "make sure their governors and parents understand the school's approach to teaching and learning styles" and stressed that "the management and

organisation of teaching and learning is a matter for the headteacher in consultation with Governors, and not for the Secretary of State". He exhorted officers and advisers to do all they could in contacts with primary schools "to help people avoid extreme positions and to retain morale and confidence".

Sharp sent two letters on December 3 and on January 13 to headteachers in county schools. The first letter to all headteachers, comprising four pages, included sections on the county's budget, the Education Bill on school inspections and the publication of exam results as well as on "the debate on primary teaching". The second letter for primary headteachers dealt exclusively with primary matters. The delivery of two such letters either side of the Christmas and New Year holiday is perhaps testimony to the intensity of the debate. The C.E.O. seemed anxious to establish his position with his headteacher colleagues before the publication of the Discussion Paper. He was critical of aspects of the debate so far which "included some quite unjustified and ill-informed comments and runs the risk of using extremist labels about traditional or modern approaches". Sharp was, at pains, to clarify his view of primary practice in Buckinghamshire. He claimed "the evidence is that practically every Buckinghamshire primary school uses a well thought out mixture of several methods". Presumably this assertion was based on reports from the Principal Adviser. The C.E.O. asserted that in Bucks "the kind of directed L.E.A. ethos that Alexander found so unacceptable in Leeds is not present". Sharp continued his analysis of Bucks practice by arguing that "some aspects of the 'traditional approach' have been reduced or abandoned over the past generation because they simply did not prove effective enough for some pupils. Group and individualised learning are of course more demanding on teachers but they prove more effective in meeting the needs of individual children, providing that they are well structured and planned". There are many assumptions inherent in this statement. Sharp seems to regard "some aspects of the traditional approach" as synonymous with whole class teaching. Moreover his assertion that this "traditional approach" has been "reduced or abandoned" might cast doubt on how prevalent mixed classroom practices and organisation are in the county's primary schools. The C.E.O. also raised the issue of streaming in primary schools but stated "that we

should remember that only one in five Buckinghamshire primary schools is large enough to have more than one teaching group per age group". Sharp, looking to the future, exhorted headteachers to find opportunities "to ensure that governors and, where possible, parents, are not only well informed about the teaching methods in use in the school but understand why they are used". He was anxious to establish the legal position and quoted from the DES booklet for school governors - "The head is responsible, in consultation with other teachers and delegating to senior staff as appropriate, for deciding the exact amount of time to be given to particular subjects, the organisation of classes, the teaching methods, and the choice of equipment and materials". Sharp also referred, in this context, to the Secretary of State's statement on primary education of December 3 in which Clarke asserted that he wished to institute a debate and would not impose his solutions - "I want to assist the debate, but I would like to make it absolutely clear that I see teachers taking the lead. It is not for the Secretary of State to tell teachers how to teach or organise their classes".

In his response to the national debate over primary education in the three months before the publication of the Discussion Paper in January, Sharp had exhibited political awareness in establishing his own position and that of the Local Education Authority. He had quickly alerted his officers and advisers to the nature of the debate and given them a clear lead on what their position should be. He had kept his Headteachers informed of developments in his annual meetings with them in November and in his two letters. He had advised them to undertake an audit of classroom practices and organisation in their schools so as to be in a position to inform Governors and parents. He had also confirmed the legal responsibilities and rights of his headteachers with regard to classroom organisation and practices. He had endeavoured to establish that most Buckinghamshire primary schools were following a "mixture of several methods" which gave not only support but a lead to headteachers. He had welcomed a wide-ranging national and local primary debate although extreme positions had been criticised. He had used the Secretary of State's own words to demonstrate Clarke's lack of power to intervene in classroom organisation and methods. A commitment from, and a role for, the Local

Education Authority in relation to the primary debate had been established. The county had provided information, support and advice for its schools.

Professor Alexander's address to Buckinghamshire Primary headteachers, 3/4/92

Sharp asserted that the factors behind the invitation to Alexander were "a mixture of opportunism and planning". The C.E.O. had known Alexander for some time and was a fellow member of the national Primary Education Study Group. When a meeting of this group was arranged for April 3 in the late morning in Buckinghamshire, Sharp seized the opportunity to invite Alexander to speak to Buckinghamshire headteachers on the Discussion Paper in the first half of the morning.

The programme for the morning was sent to headteachers with a covering letter in March (Sharp 1992).

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

A MEETING FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS

3 APRIL 1992 - THE MISBOURNE UPPER SCHOOL GREAT MISSENDEN

PROGRAMME

9.15 a.m.	Welcome and introduction: Stephen Sharp
9.20 a.m.	Robin Alexander, Professor of Primary Education, University of Leeds. Chairman: Stephen Sharp
10.30 a.m.	COFFEE
11.00 a.m.	Ways forward: a discussion Chairman: Keith Harrison
12.00 noon	CLOSE

This meeting was endowed with high status by the county. As well as the C.E.O. and Principal Adviser, senior officers and a number of advisers were present. All headteachers of primary schools and special schools with primary aged pupils had been invited. It was estimated that 250 were assembled in the Misbourne Upper (12-18) school hall. This location had been selected mainly because of the capacity of its hall but also because of its proximity to Missenden Abbey, where the Primary Education Study Group meeting was to be held. Some Primary Heads present expressed surprise at a primary meeting being located in a secondary school and, ten months later, when Alexander was asked about his recollections of the meeting he could only remember that it was the "one held in a secondary school". I had requested if I might attend in view of my research interest and I was very appreciative of being invited. The C.E.O., in his opening remarks, stressed the importance of the occasion. It was seldom that Buckinghamshire primary headteachers were all assembled. It was especially opportune that "a university teacher and researcher" who had recently "shot to fame" whose main purpose was "to raise the professional standing of primary teaching" should address the meeting on primary classroom practice.

Alexander's address, which lasted for 70 minutes including questions, was structured into four areas - setting the Discussion Paper in context, highlighting each of the sections, focusing on the section on classroom practice, and how the Discussion Paper might be used not abused. Alexander, in his address and in response to the questions, had much to say about the press. He showed transparencies of some of the newspaper headlines following the Leeds Report and demonstrated how the Discussion Paper had been distorted by the press. He said he felt uncomfortable to be branded as "a right wing academic who was a scourge of primary teachers" and he deplored "the campaign to discredit him" in *The Guardian*. This "misrepresentation by the press" was characterised, he said, by distortion, polarisation, and sensationalism. He drew attention to how frequently the word 'back' was used in newspapers as in "back to basics" and its sense as in "a return to formal teaching". Alexander was critical of the "adversarial climate" and suggested that the Discussion Paper had become "a victim of sensationalism". He

admitted that the press reaction was such that he "would never again wish to repeat the experience". Alexander was prepared publicly to reveal his tribulations at the hands of the press. Undoubtedly many in his audience were sympathetic but one later commented that he was "naive" in his expectations of what might happen in the political arena and that "he protested too much about his treatment by the press". Alexander seemed at pains to justify his position.

During his address, Alexander also gave some indication of his personal and professional reactions to being involved in the team of three. He confessed he was an "outsider" as the other two were "close to the government". He also admitted to misgivings over aspects of the Discussion Paper - "if I had another chance I would not write the same paper". He was, for example, critical of the time-scale of its preparation. He would have liked more time "for research and reflection". He also conceded that the evidence for a rise or fall in standards was "unclear". He also addressed the issue of the prevalence of 'progressivism'. He seemed ill at ease as he claimed that the Discussion Paper did not state "that the whole system is monolithic and swept by a tide of Plowdenism". He deplored "the tendency to scapegoat Plowden. It has been influential but unevenly spread - the debate has become personalised and polarised". Nevertheless Alexander seemed unconvincing on this issue and was not able to say precisely how prevalent 'progressivism' was in primary schools. It was surprising that he did not refer to the evidence of recent research or to HMI reports on primary schools. He was also concerned about aspects of the tone of the Discussion Paper. He referred to its "sound-bites" - those words or statements critical of teachers - which had been seized upon by the press. He was critical of the 'three wise men' sobriquet which he deemed "ludicrous". He also referred to his irritation that the Discussion Paper when it arrived in schools two weeks after the press launch had been "rewritten by the press".

Alexander was anxious, during his address, to reassure his audience in relation to both the content and use of the Discussion Paper. He presented the Paper as "a counsel of common sense". In fact the term "common sense" was used five times during his talk.

This rhetoric seemed to be an attempt to secure the agreement of all. (It is perhaps ironic as we have seen that the Secretary of State both in his statement on primary education on December 3, 1991 and at the press launch on January 22, 1992 appealed to the same source - common sense.) Alexander argued that "the majority of the profession should approve of the middle way it espoused". It was not offering "ex-cathedra statements" but was advocating "a sane, sensible middle way" and suggesting "a very, reasonable, moderate view on crucial issues". He was at pains to point out that the status of the Discussion Paper was not that of a report but rather as a contribution to professional debate. He hoped it would give "ammunition for the primary section to argue its case", especially in relation to the "pauper legacy" of funding which, at present, was "a bar to progress on staffing and developing ways of primary teaching". Thus Alexander endeavoured to mediate the Discussion Paper in a favourable light to his audience. There was no doubt about his concerns for primary education but there was a feeling that he was embarrassed by the Paper's imperfections. Nevertheless Alexander argued that the Discussion Paper was a major contribution to debate on "the primary stage - the foundations on which everything else is based".

Alexander addressed many of the issues raised in the Discussion Paper. For example, he tackled the challenge of implementing the National Curriculum which he asserted "was here to stay. We must make it work". Like Campbell (1993) he identified "its manageability with over 400 attainment targets" as the central concern. He asserted that it was "mind-blowing for class teachers" and "unreasonable to expect classteachers to encompass this". He concluded by saying that "the National Curriculum must be kept under review". A certain disappointment at this statement, reinforced during questions, was detected in the meeting. Although Alexander's response to the National Curriculum was clear, perhaps headteachers expected that he might have given it more emphasis and been more critical of it, since it was the major preoccupation in their schools.

Alexander also addressed the issue of children's learning and development. He argued that "the readiness theories inherent in Piaget and Plowden have lowered expectations".

He cited the work of Vygotsky and "some recent research which confirms that children are immensely competent. They need their thinking extended and to be stretched and challenged". In relation to teaching techniques, Alexander referred to the research of Bennett, Mortimore, Tizard and Galton which "carries a central message - teachers need a broad repertoire of teaching techniques based on fitness for purpose". He advocated "the selection of appropriate techniques to achieve the aim" and suggested that the occasional use of a tape recorder in the classroom was a salutary "ear opener". He also argued that some of the techniques associated with teaching the whole class like questioning and explaining had been neglected.

Alexander invited his audience to "consider ways in which staff might be employed to make maximum use of their expertise". He argued that the class teacher system was based on the elementary tradition which was "the cheapest way to educate children". HMI had suggested the use of curriculum consultants but he advocated a consideration of "the four modes in the continuum" outlined in the Discussion Paper. Alexander argued that the subject knowledge of a teacher was important and that there had always been some subject teaching - for example maths and P. E. Nevertheless, he asserted that the Discussion Paper had been over-simplified in the press. He claimed it had not advocated "a return to subject teaching". He addressed the issue relating to topic work by arguing that the Discussion Paper "did not recommend teachers to abandon topic work". The "integrity of subjects needs to be there (in topic work) and a mix of topic and subject work is perfectly viable". Finally, Alexander referred to section 8 of the Discussion Paper and repeated the assertion that headteachers, in spite of many pressing burdens including local management of schools, should aspire to be educational leaders.

On the whole, my informal conversations with primary headteachers after the meeting confirmed that Alexander had impressed his audience. He seemed to succeed in establishing his credibility. His frankness, his obvious commitment to primary education, his awareness of the sensitivities of his audience ("the voice of primary headteachers needs to be heard") and his attention to significant detail ("the non-contact time for

primary classteachers has been calculated at eight minutes per day") all went down well. He seemed to have satisfied and reassured his audience that the Discussion Paper was "a common sense", "middle-way" document which would be useful to primary educationalists. For example, Smith, a combined school headteacher, asserted "He is on our side. He is encouraging critical analysis of classroom practice". Smith, who had reacted very critically on first reading the views on 'progressivism' in the Discussion Paper commented that he had been reassured by "Alexander's moderation". Alexander was not challenged during question time. Surprisingly, perhaps, there were no questions relating to the independence of the three authors, the early years of education, the Paper's handling of the prevalence of 'progressivism' and the Paper's criticism of 'dogma' amongst teachers. Alexander dealt with most questions confidently enough. However, his responses to questions based on aspects of Buckinghamshire policy relating to both selection for, and transfer to, secondary school at 12, revealed that he had not been briefed on these matters.

During his address, Alexander seemed uncomfortable in three respects. He admitted that he had been hurt by the press reactions to both reports with which he had been involved. He seemed to indicate that working in the team of three had not been easy. For example, Smith remarked afterwards "There was obvious dissent in the three wise men".

Alexander also seemed defensive about aspects of the tone and the research base of the Discussion Paper. Scarth, a headteacher of a middle school in Milton Keynes present at the talk, was critical. He argued that Alexander had sought to elicit sympathy from his audience and to distance himself from the way evidence was used, and some of the statements, in the Discussion Paper. Scarth implied that Alexander may have been trying to ingratiate himself with his audience. Perhaps Alexander was at pains to reconstruct his identity following his characterisation in the media - particularly the press - as a "folk-devil" (Cohen 1981).

Nevertheless, the overall reaction to Alexander's talk was positive. For example, Joyce - a first school head teacher - stated that "it was good to hear the voice and see the face of

the name" and Martin reported that "with one or two exceptions" she had gathered "very favourable impressions" of the talk from headteachers. She asserted that, on the whole, headteachers were "enthusiastic and wanted to take it on further". Alexander's address proved to be, she asserted, "the catalyst for the county's primary initiative". Buckinghamshire's C.E.O. had made good use of his contacts in high places. Primary headteachers at the event had subsequently expressed their approval of the invitation to Professor Alexander. For example, Smith asserted "getting Alexander to Misbourne was excellent".

The preparation of the Authority's 'statement of response' to the Discussion Paper

Sharp in his letter of invitation to primary headteachers to attend Alexander's address, also wrote of the arrangements he had made "for county-wide discussions of the Paper and the production of a response to it". As early as March the C.E.O.'s letter made clear his intentions that the outcome of this activity would be "a draft statement of response to the three wise men's paper" from which he would "produce a final version for the Education Committee, for all those in the Buckinghamshire Education Service and perhaps for those who live in Buckinghamshire and have children in our primary schools". By September 1992 this had been achieved with the publication of *Achieving Quality in Primary Education* together with a synopsis mainly designed for school governors.

Aspects of the process by which the county prepared its statement will be analysed. These will include the type of response to the Discussion Paper initiated by the county, its time-scale, the nature of the consultation, the role of the two seconded headteachers and, finally, the product itself.

The time-table of the preparation of the authority's 'statement of response', March to September 1992

- March C.E.O.'s letter to primary headteachers, inviting them to Alexander's address, and outlining the arrangements for the county's "statement of response".
- April 3 Alexander's address at the Misbourne School
- Later in April headteachers' meetings in the four areas of the county to begin the preparation of a response and to nominate four headteachers for the May 12 meeting.
- April 24 Letter to primary headteachers from Graham Marshall, primary adviser, informing them of the detailed purposes and outcomes of the work.
- April 28 Letter from the two seconded headteachers, Anne Hayes and Frank Schencks, requesting responses from headteachers.
- May 12 Day meeting of the group of 28 nominated: primary headteachers (17), secondary headteachers (2), advisers (4) and officers (5) at Missenden Abbey to co-ordinate and study responses and to decide on "the shape of the document".
- May 13 Letter from Pauline Martin, primary adviser, informing primary headteachers of the progress of the work on May 12, including the purpose and main headings of the document now named *Achieving Quality in Primary Education in Buckinghamshire* and requesting more responses from headteachers.
- June 22 First draft of *Achieving Quality* was sent to headteachers for comments.
- July 6/7 The two day Primary Policy Seminar at Missenden Abbey considered the draft of *Achieving Quality* and began preparation of the synopsis.

July 15 The revised draft of *Achieving Quality* was delivered to C.E.O..

September The two documents *Achieving Quality in Primary Education* and the synopsis were published and sent to schools.

The nature of the response to the Discussion Paper was decided by the authority from the outset. As has been shown, the C.E.O.'s initial letter to primary headteachers spoke of "a draft statement of response". This was confirmed by the Principal Adviser, Keith Harrison, in his discussion session with primary headteachers at Misbourne School following Alexander's address. Harrison asserted that "the county wanted to prepare a statement which not only reflected and reviewed primary policy and practice in schools' but also would "serve as guidelines for each school". In addition, he stated that it was hoped to produce a small pamphlet for the public "to counteract the bad press of the primary sector". Although twenty questions or statements were made by headteachers during this session, none challenged the nature of the county's proposed response. At least two statements from headteachers supported the idea of producing a document which would "offer a positive image" (of primary education) and "a celebration of good practices would help to destroy the myths".

Although headteachers had the opportunity to voice their views and contribute to the process of naming, shaping and giving section headings to the statement, it is clear from the beginning that the authority had established that the eventual product would be a written statement. Later, in an interview in December 1992, the C.E.O. was asked about this. He agreed that he had assumed the product would be a written statement. He admitted "Well, maybe the message had gone out that that was what I was looking for". However, he implied that if the headteachers had recommended a different format - for example, a video - he might have agreed to a change. It was possible for the county to use the seconded headteachers and the funding in other ways. For example, one headteacher later suggested that INSET workshops for classteachers on the issues raised in the Discussion Paper might have proved a better use of the money.

Although the form of the product was predetermined by the county, the process of consulting and involving headteachers resulted in them influencing the type and scope of the document. Martin, in a letter to primary headteachers, summarised the crucial May 12 meeting at Missenden Abbey to plan the document. As well as deciding on its title the group had taken the key decision that the document would be a "professional publication". It would acknowledge what is welcomed in the Discussion Paper. It would "address issues for further research to establish an evidence base". It would enable schools "to evaluate and audit their practice". It would provide an "opportunity for schools to recognise their achievements". It would "recognise that schools are already working very hard in implementing the National Curriculum and will endeavour to reflect what is reasonable and realistic". It would provide a basis "on which a pamphlet can be made available for the public" and "resource implications will be considered throughout". The meeting of May 12 was seminal as it largely influenced the tone and scope of the eventual publication. The scope of the document had been broadened. It was to be more than a direct response to the Discussion Paper, although that legitimised the initial concept. It was intended that it should celebrate primary education in Buckinghamshire. It was also viewed as a professional tool for self-evaluation in schools. Later Martin in an interview commented that schools would "use it to audit their practices". It would also have a political use in contributing to the case for enhanced resources for the primary sector. These aims seemed congruent with the original purposes of the county initiative.

From the beginning the time-scale for an initiative of this type was short in terms of a Local Authority timetable. The national Discussion Paper had taken seven weeks to prepare while the final published local response was achieved in six months. Sharp, in his March letter to primary headteachers, had established the time scale. He expected the draft authority statement would be completed and "distributed to all headteachers at the beginning of June". This schedule was confirmed by the Principal Adviser during his hour session with primary headteachers following Alexander's address. This deadline was not met. The draft document was sent to schools three weeks later on June 22.

Sharp explained the reasons for this haste. He was anxious to have the draft statement by early summer in order that it might contribute not only to his annual C.E.O. Report which was drafted in July, August and September for publication in October, but also it would provide useful material for the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) debate within the authority in the autumn, the outcome of which would be reflected in the Education Committee's budget. Although Martin confirmed that the initiative was constrained by "a very tight time-scale" she was gratified that the final statement and the synopsis were published and distributed to schools in September.

The process was grounded in consultation. Both Sharp and Martin referred to the "ground swell" of interest and concern of Buckinghamshire primary headteachers following the distribution of the Discussion Paper to schools. The Professional Associations in the county - such as N.A.H.T. and N.U.T., the Bucks Primary Association (a group of headteachers) and the Milton Keynes Education Partnership were reported by Martin to have communicated a keen interest to the authority. Sharp was anxious "to help schools focus issues" and to channel this interest. He was also concerned to limit the damage which he believed had been done by "the political motivation" of the Discussion Paper and to raise the morale of headteachers and teachers in the primary sector. Later Sharp asserted that the consultation process and the publication of *Achieving Quality* had been achieved "by a lot of people being involved" and had contributed to ensuring that "primary morale was partly turned round". Martin believed that the consultation process and the publication of a county document "would help to keep the debate purposeful". She later asserted "It was very important that we had thoughts from as many different headteachers as possible".

The presence of so many primary headteachers at Alexander's address - it was estimated there were at least 225 out of a possible 280 - enabled the Principal Adviser to consult them on the proposed county initiative as well as eliciting their views relating to the Discussion Paper. In the event ten out of the twenty statements or questions raised by the headteachers during the hour long discussion session were related to resources. Harrison

stated that the county "genuinely wanted to consult headteachers and to seek their views about the way forward" and wished "to support work related to the Discussion Paper which heads were already undertaking with their staffs and governors". At one stage he referred to a paper which had been placed on the chairs during the coffee break which listed ten issues arising from the Discussion Paper "to which consideration has to be given". The headteachers did not react favourably to this short document. One questioned its language, challenging the use of the term "delivery". Another drew considerable support from his colleagues when he asked why "resourcing" was at the foot of the list. The headteachers seemed irritated by this document and regarded it as a distraction. Later one headteacher castigated this document as "half-baked". The headteachers were not clear of its purpose and there was some criticism that its source was not attributed. It had, in fact, been prepared by the Advisory Service.

Apart from this rebuff no headteacher challenged the proposed county initiative as Harrison outlined the process. He confirmed that the C.E.O.'s March letter recommended that the initial work was to be done in four area groupings of headteachers - Milton Keynes, Aylesbury Vale, Wycombe and Chiltern and South Bucks - following the April 3 meeting. Harrison, once again referring to the C.E.O.'s March letter, outlined the "arrangements for up to 30 colleagues to meet for the whole day on May 12 to bring together all the most important points made in the area discussions". Harrison commended the C.E.O.'s suggestion "that each area nominated four headteachers to represent them at the May 12 meeting" and that "the area managers and Senior Adviser for each area shall be represented, together with Pauline Martin and Graham Marshall". Once again, no objections were raised to this mode of consultation and the May 12 meeting was based on these proposals.

Harrison encouraged all headteachers to send to County Hall any views or relevant materials on the county response to the Discussion Paper. This request was also repeated in Marshall and Martin's letters to headteachers of April 24 and May 13 respectively. In the event 30 individual submissions from headteachers were received, together with some

collective submissions from headteacher groups. Perhaps surprisingly, Martin and Sharp, in their consultations in September and December respectively, expressed satisfaction with this response.

Once the draft document was prepared it was sent to all primary headteachers on June 22 inviting comments. Martin stated that "very few responses" were received. Later, one of the seconded headteachers, Frank Schencks, attributed this limited response to the busy time of the term - late June and early July - and the tight schedule for responses - three weeks. Another reason might be that, on the whole, headteachers were generally satisfied with the draft.

Thus the consultation had been planned by the county as early as March. It had been mediated with some success by the C.E.O. and members of the Officer and Advisory Service "had worked in partnership with headteachers" according to seconded headteacher, Anne Hayes. Advantage had been taken of having virtually all the primary headteachers together on April 3 in a forum to discuss and to launch the consultation. However, it was puzzling that the headteachers were not informed on April 3 that two primary headteachers had been seconded to expedite the work of preparing the county document. It has not proved possible to discover an explanation. It has been suggested that the county preferred not to declare these secondments for fear of appearing to have pre-determined too much in advance. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that the two headteachers had been invited and had agreed to be seconded before April 3. This is confirmed by both Hayes and Schencks. For example, Hayes spoke of it "as a missed opportunity". She would have preferred her colleagues to know of the appointment of the two seconded headteachers at the meeting on April 3.

Little subsequent criticism of the county's mode of consultation has been discovered. The relatively small number of headteachers involved in the meeting of May 12 - eighteen participated - does not seem to have been challenged. It may well be that most headteachers viewed this arrangement as practical and effective and were happy to leave the planning of the document to these eighteen and the two seconded headteachers. As

ever, headteachers were preoccupied with many other issues - for example, Circular 5/92: *Reporting to Parents* - which caused considerable controversy - arrived in schools on May 13. Moreover, they were all able to contribute, if they wished, by sending responses to County Hall. What may be more noteworthy is the absence of direct involvement of primary class teachers in the consultation.

Anne Hayes, Headteacher of Elangeni Middle School, and Frank Schencks, Headteacher of Lakes First School, were appointed seconded headteachers late in March 1992. Martin stated that considerable care had been given to making "a balanced choice". The two were chosen after consultation between the area managers and the Advisory Service and were invited to undertake the role by their attached adviser. The county considered that two were sufficient for the task. Later, Scarth in an interview was to call their selection a "dream ticket". There was a gender balance, one was from the north of the county, while the other was from the south, first and middle schools were represented and the catchment area of Lakes First School is a council estate, while Elangeni Middle School is largely composed of private housing.

They did not receive a written specification of their role but they understood from Pauline Martin, their main point of contact at County Hall, that they were "to co-ordinate the response of the headteachers and prepare a draft document for the C.E.O.". Each was to have the equivalent of ten days secondment, which was to be paid in the form of supply cover into their school budget. The ten days could be taken at the headteachers' discretion in May and June. They could also claim a travel allowance. They were given a timetable which outlined the programme of the county's consultation process between April and July, which provided them with an acceptable structure. They were clear as to their role and schedule, which had been planned in advance by the county and then negotiated.

Their views on the Discussion Paper varied. Schencks from the evidence of his interview regarded it with considerable hostility. He believed it was "politically motivated" and constituted "another attack on primary teachers" and was designed "to bring the teaching

force into line". He was also critical of "its attack on progressive methods". He said he became more aware of the pressures on headteachers and primary class teachers because of his secondment. He indicated that "the National Curriculum burdened teachers enough" and he wanted "to cushion his own staff from further pressure". He asserted that the issues raised by the Discussion Paper were "low down on the list of priorities" and that its status was that of a discussion paper. It was not "a prescriptive document like National Curriculum Orders".

However, he had found Alexander's address "positive" and was pleased to have heard his views. He argued that "the professor was naive politically" and was trying "to distance himself from the Discussion Paper". However, Schencks trusted Alexander as he believed him "close to teachers" and "motivated by educational considerations". In spite of having some misgivings about aspects of the Discussion Paper, Schencks said that he felt "flattered but daunted" by the invitation from the county and he was ready to accept "a co-ordinating role". However, he was unsure of the C.E.O.'s motives for launching the county initiative but supposed Sharp was "asking the profession via headteachers what they thought about 'the three wise men's' report".

Hayes in an interview reported that, on the whole, she had welcomed the Discussion Paper. In particular, she approved of the call for enhanced funding for primary schools (Alexander et al 1992, p.5). She and her colleagues at Elangeni Middle School were considering a pilot scheme for setting in mathematics in year 7 in September 1992. She argued that the Discussion Paper legitimised this particular type of organisation - "the tide is with us". Nevertheless, she found some aspects of the Discussion Paper "insulting". For example, she found the "references to 'dogma' are ironic since the Paper enunciates its own dogma". She maintained that "enormous soul-searching goes on in primary schools all the time and it is not helpful or appropriate to be decreed to from above". She asserted that "the internal organisation of the school is the headteacher's prerogative", and feared that the Paper might presage governmental intervention into classrooms. She had found Alexander's talk useful and centred on his personality and motivation. She

believed he had been very "bruised" by his experiences especially from the press. He had presented himself "as one of us", had revealed the conflict between the three authors and had, according to Hayes, tried to gain sympathy from his audience. She believed he had shown "political naiveté". Anne Hayes was delighted with the county's initiative in responding to the Discussion Paper. It was "stunning" and "struck a blow for primary schools". "Perhaps", she surmised, "it is something to do with the fact that Stephen Sharp is married to a Year 2 teacher and knows Professor Alexander". She had been gratified to be invited by her attached adviser to undertake a key role in the consultation process. In this way the county had chosen to nominate its seconded headteachers rather than invite applications.

The main features of their work were to encourage their headteacher colleagues to offer their views on the Discussion Paper and to use their submissions to prepare a draft document. On April 28 Hayes and Schencks sent a letter to all primary headteachers in the county "requesting reactions from yourself, colleagues, liaison groups, headteachers or other meetings as soon as possible". They affirmed that "any measure of response is both valuable and vital to the task we are undertaking" and concluded by "anticipating a deluge of responses". Later Schencks considered there had been "an eager and full response" considering the "tight time scale". He believed there had been opportunities in the consultation for headteachers "to shed their disgruntlement" and "plenty of source material" had been generated orally and in writing from individual headteachers, headteacher organisations, officers and advisers and the National Primary Centre.

He stated that the responsibility of Anne Hayes and himself was "to represent fairly the views of colleagues". He reported that he found the May 12 meeting very useful - "the shape of the document was hammered out and the main headings were identified". Schencks reported that Anne Hayes and he worked "harmoniously together" and agreed which chapters each should write. "Each wrote from the source material and then we got together, sometimes with Pauline Martin, to consider each other's drafts and to edit them". Although only 30 written submissions were received from headteachers, Martin

("there was enough documentation") Hayes and Schencks agreed that this was sufficient material to prepare the draft.

Hayes and Schencks, with support from Martin, worked quickly. They did well to achieve completion of the draft by the middle of June. Both reported that the experience had been enjoyable and professionally satisfying. They had worked well as a team - Schencks declared himself "discursive" and Hayes "succinct". Both admitted that they had not had the time to visit schools to elicit the views of headteachers directly but were satisfied that they had been able "to encourage a number of headteachers to respond". They reported that the support from the county had been "useful" but on some occasions it had proved difficult to secure practical help as in the case of the word processor which Schencks extracted on his own initiative from the county's computer centre at Great Hampden.

Scarth identified the problems of preparing the county's document *Achieving Quality* - "It was a very difficult task especially in view of 'disparate views'. "Buckinghamshire isn't an authority which has a clear line on any one issue in primary education. It's very split and these folk (Hayes and Schencks) had at times opposite views to try to put a response to... Some heads from the south of the county were happy with whole class teaching and ready to introduce subject teaching at the drop of a hat. There were heads in Milton Keynes who would stand with pickaxe in hands ready to defend a totally opposite point of view". Although this statement might be queried it has enough substance to demonstrate one of the difficulties facing the authors. Another problem which the authors reported was that they were not entirely sure of their purpose - were they to use the responses to fashion their own response or were they merely to record the comments from fellow headteachers? In the event Hayes recalled, in an informal conversation with me a year later, that she and Schencks were given the responsibility to decide for themselves. They resolved to give emphasis to the evidence sent in by headteachers and to ensure that at least one part of each response received was included in *Achieving Quality*.

These basic difficulties were also compounded by the declared, diverse purposes of the document, which was conceived as "a response to the national Discussion Paper in the form of a professional document for discussion by the educational community" (Bucks 1992 p.1). However, it was more than this. Martin viewed it as "a mission statement" and Scarth as "a celebration". Joyce hoped, like many other of her colleagues, that the document might "identify an ethos" and serve as a catalyst for the county to prepare a policy statement - "I do feel that it is an opportunity for Bucks L.E.A. to decide on its ethos, I don't think the county has a particularly strong primary ethos - so it is an ideal opportunity for them to decide where they stand and what the whole county believes". This celebratory dimension is confirmed in *Achieving Quality's* introduction - "It may also assist in an articulation of achievements... across the county". In addition, other purposes were identified. The introduction to the Document states that it "may serve as a means to survey present arrangements within schools" and "as guidelines for identifying priorities and future developments". Hayes and Schencks expressed concern that they had not had the opportunity to meet the C.E.O. during the three months from mid-April to early July. There was general approval of the selection and of the way they went about their work from fellow headteachers. For example, Scarth: "I think the two heads concerned have done a very good job given what they had to do". Each headteacher contributed an input far in excess of ten working days. Thus the Document was to fulfil varied purposes. It could not be an analytical response to the Discussion Paper because it was to embody a celebration of Buckinghamshire's primary practice. It was to serve as an instrument of audit for schools as well as providing a basis for "a Bucks statement on primary education". The Document lacked a clear single purpose. As will be shown later this initial confusion was to impair the effectiveness of the Document severely.

Nevertheless *Achieving Quality* exhibited some strengths. Not surprisingly, since the main preoccupation of schools since 1988 has been to implement the National Curriculum, the Document offered a clear commentary on the National Curriculum. The Document began its survey of the National Curriculum by agreeing with the "assertion in the Discussion Paper (para. 66) that a National Curriculum derived from nine completely

different subjects is very difficult to teach satisfactorily in an integrated way" (p.3). It reports that "an increasing number of Buckinghamshire primary schools are including some separate teaching of subjects" but maintains that "subject specific teaching in itself does not hold the monopoly on quality teaching and learning..." (p.3). It identifies some of the major challenges of the National Curriculum to Buckinghamshire Schools. It argues that "the demands made by the National Curriculum on small village schools require further serious consideration" (p.3). It asserts that "in all Bucks schools the curriculum crosses Key Stage boundaries. The presence of Key Stage 2 children in our first schools and Key Stage 3 children in our middle schools pose challenges" (p.4). It is regretted that "the [Discussion] Paper failed to address the problem of manageability adequately" (p.7) and "manageability... is increasingly a problem" (p.5). "A realistic appraisal of the content and structure of the National Curriculum in terms of its relevance to primary aged children" (p.6) is advocated. Considerable doubt is expressed as to whether "a single classroom teacher could possess all necessary expertise" (p.6). "The manageability of the National Curriculum was not to be seen as support for the Discussion Paper's position on the necessity for increased subject teaching. Rather it should be seen as "a challenge to the National Curriculum as presently conceived" (p.7). Criticisms of the National Curriculum are rehearsed: "It is too crowded, too detailed, confuses levels of skill, concept and content and "squeezes" important areas of work, notably the development of reading and literacy skills" (p.7). "The idea that any major advances relating to increased teacher expertise, resourcing, assessment, planning, record keeping and headteachers' roles could be achieved by schools, without extra resourcing, is rejected" (p.7). Rather, each school is recommended "to identify in priority order the specific areas to which funds might be targeted to achieve maximum effect and to identify the exact cost" (p.7).

There was also a confidence and a clarity in the Document when identifying the use to which any enhanced funding might be put. For example "to make a better use of teacher time, particularly in some of the large classes in the Bucks system, the use of assistants should be pursued" (p.4) and "Many primary teachers still have little or no non-contact

time for planning and preparation. The provision of a small but significant amount of (non-contact) time for all primary teachers would allow teachers time out of the classroom to develop the skills and expertise required of them" (p.4). In addition, support for headteachers should include "funding to enable employment of finance officers or bursars in our primary schools to deal with the multitude of administrative matters which currently encroach upon or engulf the time the headteacher is able to spend on educational matters" (p.10). Thus many of the recommendations made by Campbell (1993) were put forward.

Achieving Quality is a slim A4 pamphlet comprising 20 pages. Its format is clear. There is an introduction and a summary. Each of the other six sections have a common structure of four headings - "issues arising from the Discussion Paper", "Buckinghamshire responses", "recommendations" and "questions arising for schools and their governors and for the Local Authority". Usually the issues arising from the Discussion Paper are closely identified - for example "organisational strategies", "classteacher and subject knowledge", "fitness for purpose". However, some key issues are not considered - for example, the Discussion Paper's emphasis on children's cognitive learning and the necessity of challenging them intellectually. At times issues are raised which do not directly relate to the Discussion Paper - for example "children with specific needs" and "parents, partnership and politics". Possibly the "Buckinghamshire responses" sections are the weakest. One of the declared aims is "to identify and celebrate success in our current practice" (p.2). This is reinforced on Page 8 "Schools and the Authority should identify and communicate effective practices". *Achieving Quality's* main shortcoming is that it misses the opportunity to celebrate achievements in the county's primary schools. Joyce (1993) asserted "It gives few examples of actual practices in primary schools". For example, one of the recommendations is that "schools should actively build partnership with parents" (p.17). This would have been a much more useful and powerful statement if some of the many successful examples of home-school links in Buckinghamshire primary schools had been outlined. The recommendation sections are usually concise and practical. Priorities are identified for both schools and

Local Authority. The sections outlining questions for schools and their governors and for the county are pertinent and clear. Inevitably in this kind of discourse there is a tendency to pose leading questions - for example "What evidence might demonstrate that they (schools) perhaps need extra resources just to maintain present levels of functioning and performance?" (p.18).

At times *Achieving Quality* appears negative and defensive in tone. Although it is asserted that 'As professionals we all agree that debate about primary education is desirable' (p.1), some statements give the impression that a debate is not welcomed, perhaps for fear of political prescription. For example "The public and political agenda for education has been set for us. It is not necessarily our agenda, nor is it the one we may wish to see. Nevertheless we are compelled to respond to it" (p.16) and "The existence of the Discussion Paper is indicative of the public and political nature that education has taken over the last few years. It is one more instance of the pressures that impact upon the profession and upon schools almost daily" (p.16). Although many teachers echo these views the appropriateness of this type of comment in this type of document may be queried although there may be few such opportunities for the teachers to voice their concerns.

Questions may also be asked about the values inherent in *Achieving Quality* and how far it is a contribution to open debate, for example, assertions like "There is a clear feeling that colleagues wish to maintain and develop current practice because they feel it is the best way to meet children's complex needs" (p.6). It is not clear what constitutes this "current practice" and how prevalent it is in Bucks schools. No analysis or supporting evidence are offered. The same might be said of statements like "Most schools and teachers would claim to be child-centred in the sense that the organisation of the curriculum and classroom practice resulted from an understanding of children's learning..." and "It was felt that the generalist class teacher, especially at Key Stage 1, was both desirable and essential if teachers are to continue to educate the whole child rather than just deliver the National Curriculum" (p.5). There appears to be a tendency to

close down debate almost as soon as an issue is identified. Further examples of this tendency are "The class teacher model has been, and by and large still is, unanimously preferred for reasons of pastoral care, security relationships, social development and cross-curricular links" (p.3) and "It is recommended that Buckinghamshire schools should retain their commitment to models of classroom practice that emphasise the education of the whole child" (p.7). Nevertheless the role of the seconded headteachers was to summarise general views.

Achieving Quality exhibits other shortcomings. Frequently assertions are made - for example "Teachers have always followed this principle" (p.6) - in relation to "fitness for purpose" and "children had done well in mixed age and single age settings" (p.3) without any supporting evidence, although it is asserted that "our voice will be all the stronger if in responding to the document (Discussion Paper) we are able to establish evidence on which to reaffirm our professional knowledge and from which we can establish shared principles and policies" (p.6). One headteacher spoke of "Achieving Quality's" tendency "to skate over big issues". For example, the key issues relating to topic and subject work and to generalist/specialist teacher continuum are not analysed in detail, although the tensions these issues engender in the authors are very apparent. On occasions the document resorts to the slogans ("primary-speak") and dichotomies identified by Alexander. For example, subjects are characterised as "fragmented curricular elements" (p.6) and polarities like "For teachers the main need is to be a successful teacher of a class of children. The importance of this should not be sacrificed to the notion that subject knowledge on the part of teachers should become the main requirement" (p.5) although later it is admitted that "there was real doubt now that a single classroom teacher could possess all the necessary expertise" (p.6). There is an unwillingness to pursue this and consider the implications. The polarity between teaching and learning is rehearsed as though the two are mutually exclusive. On occasions there is also an appeal to "outside experts" - for example "Schools should be helped to establish a rationale for appropriate curriculum arrangements". There are also instances of confusion - for example, in Section 4 "The Primary School Headteacher" the terms "administration" and "manager"

are used interchangeably. The disconcerting amalgam of shortcomings in *Achieving Quality* may be largely ascribed to its defence of the status quo, its variety of purposes and its intention of satisfying various interest groups. In some respects, it bore echoes of the contradictions inherent in the Discussion Paper to which it was responding.

Achieving Quality in Primary Education - a synopsis was published and delivered to schools at the same time as the original document. The synopsis has seven A4 pages, comprising three pages which summarise the purpose, and principles of , and contributors to, the original document, a summary of current practice in Buckinghamshire schools and short statements on three key issues from Bucks schools relating to the National Curriculum, their values and their priorities. There are also four densely packed pages with five headings on each - 'Issues identified on the Discussion Paper', 'Evidence/Comment from Bucks schools', 'Some strategies used or suggested by schools', 'Questions arising for Schools and Governors' and 'Questions arising for L.E.A., parents and NCC'. The statements in these tables relate largely to the original document but the drafting is concise and judicious, and some of the most infelicitous statements in the original have been discarded or modified. Sharp confirms he was the author of this synopsis: "There was a bit of work I felt, in the late summer, still to be done to turn it (*Achieving Quality*) from what was a very thorough piece of professional work, by professionals for professionals, into something which could have a wider impact as well. We moved from the draft report to me to the two tier thing largely with the main document unchanged but the synopsis that could pick out some questions for the various parts of the service". Sharp added "It's important to retain the ownership of the work that was done but it is inevitable that there is another dimension when you get towards committees and governors in which officers can help". The C.E.O. confirmed that the synopsis was largely designed for use by governors - "I plan to put it on the agenda of every primary governing body next term" in order that "in a reasonable discussion in a governing body meeting the headteacher can run down the checklist of questions and explain how things are in the school and give his or her own report to the governors on it". Sharp, in a letter in January to primary headteachers, reinforced this by saying "I

would stress the importance I attach to the use this term, by governing bodies or their curriculum sub-committees, of the booklet *Achieving Quality in Primary Education* a *Synopsis*. Sharp had put into practice the assertion of Maden (1993; p.118) that "the nexus of governors and headteachers working constructively... with Local Authority members and officers" is one of the positive strengths of a Local Authority.

Reactions to *Achieving Quality* vary. It is significant that two of the authors of the Discussion Paper have made differing responses. Rose (1992) wrote to Sharp thanking him for the two papers, saying "The papers seem to me to exemplify just the kind of professional response the Report was designed to stimulate. It was, after all, intended to generate debate rather than pronounce on the 'last word' or the 'best buy' in primary education". On the other hand, Alexander (in his interview) suggested that *Achieving Quality* represented a "top down model" since it was largely the product of headteachers and advisers. He commented that it was "defensive" and seemed "to speak with a single voice". There was a danger of it "telling teachers what to think". He feared it might have "foreclosed the debate" by "a fairly dogmatic statement".

Hayes and Schencks believed they had produced a "robust professional document". Schencks said he was "fairly pleased given the time scale" but he had misgivings about how useful it would be to teachers and how far it would have any influence in the bid for resources. He expressed doubts about the title - it made no reference either to children or to Buckinghamshire and could be seen to imply that quality was lacking hitherto. Sharp asserted that the document would contribute to INSET. One headteacher consulted commended the Document, but of the twenty headteachers with whom I had informal discussions, most headteachers expressed misgivings and disappointment. One headteacher said that the tension between topic work and subjects had not been addressed in detail, the document was aimed exclusively at headteachers, it was "very flat, bland and colourless" and "examples of good practices were not given". Another spoke of it as "yet more verbiage" and argued that it had "no impact and no highlights", while another commented "I don't think it has worked. By the time the document came out a lot of

schools had responded in one form or another to the 'Three Wise Men' Discussion Paper, so to receive another document - fairly weighty - missed the boat. The moment had passed somehow. I am a great believer in trying to get things down on a couple of pages, otherwise they are not well received. It was the wrong time, it was the wrong format and it was a bit lengthy". Another headteacher suggested that *Achieving Quality* was "perplexing" "it was a grand design hung on what should have been a specific response - it did not address specific issues" and demonstrated some of the features criticised in the Discussion Paper - "ideology, vagueness and jargon".

The Local Authority had decided to respond to the Discussion Paper with another document. Although it gave an opportunity to headteachers "to speak with a united voice for the profession" and to articulate good practices in local schools, its conflicting purposes contributed to a flawed product. Moreover there was some criticism of the quality of support from the county in relation to the preparation of *Achieving Quality*. For example, one headteacher argued that its "message was confused" and suggested that perhaps the ambivalent views of some county advisers to the Alexander et al Discussion Paper had clouded the advice and guidance the headteacher authors received. From the evidence of *Achieving Quality* itself it can be argued that it would have benefited from a rather different editorial approach. If this is so the county lost an opportunity for, as Maden (1993 p.119) argues "The strength of local authorities is often found in the quality of... their support services". It appears that Hayes and Schencks were given freedom and responsibility to follow their own devices and received warm encouragement but minimal guidance.

The funding issue

The Discussion Paper was very clear on the funding of primary education - "There is, in our view, no justification for the fact that year 6 pupils in primary schools are funded less generously than year 7 pupils in secondary schools". However, the authors of the Discussion Paper were at pains to emphasise the responsibility of local authorities rather than central government in this respect - the L.E.A. will be central "as far as

improvements in primary school staffing depend partly on addressing current funding anomalies" (Paragraph 187). The Discussion Paper fuelled the financial debate.

The C.E.O.: "I think we do need to have more resources in primary education" and the primary headteachers were united on this issue. For example, during the hour session with the Principal Adviser following Alexander's address, primary headteachers seized the opportunity to attack inadequate resources. Comments like "the job is impossible with the resources we are given", "we are trying to do a modern job with old-fashioned resources" and "the opportunity presented by Local Management of Schools (LMS) was lost" revealed what a major issue it was to headteachers. Harrison, the Principal Adviser, assured the headteachers that local and national politicians were already being actively lobbied to enhance primary funding and that the county's statement in response to the Discussion Paper would be useful in this process. One headteacher, as if with foresight, asserted "We have seen all this before in the primary initiative of 1987 - in spite of this kind of response - nothing ever happens". Nevertheless, Harrison persisted in his optimism that enhanced resources for the primary section might be achieved. He linked the preparation of the county's response to the Discussion Paper closely to making the case for improved resources.

On April 3 Harrison also informed the headteachers that the county was actively engaged in persuading the government to give an overall boost to the funding of primary education in the next expenditure round. Sharp in an interview explained how this came about - "Because of my role with the County Council Education Officer's Society I finished up as the representative of local government in front of Mr Patten in June (1992) to put the case for the spending needs of the next year for education... and was able personally to talk about primary education". However, his request was unsuccessful. Campbell's (1993, p.100) argument that "the way forward would be to develop a central policy to improve primary staffing through the funding formulae in the LMS schemes" had not been heeded.

The only possibility for improved funding for the primary sector now resided with the County Council. In June the county's Local Management Panel, a sub-committee of the Education Committee, began the process of reviewing the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU). The way in which funding is allocated to schools may be briefly outlined. The General Schools Budget (GSB) contains the total expenditure on schools. The budgets for Primary, Secondary and Special Schools are distinct parts of the budget. The Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) is that part of the General Schools Budget which is delegated to schools through the LMS formula. In 1992-3 80% of ASB was allocated to schools by reference to pupil numbers - that is through the AWPU's. In turn, the teaching staff costs amount to approximately four-fifths of the AWPU's. In 1992-3, the budget was based on the following PTRs.

Primary (Years 1-6)	25.7:1	Primary (Year 7)	19.0:1
Secondary (Years 9-11)	18.7:1	Secondary (Years 12, 13)	12.9:1

When this is translated into the funding which each pupil attracts the approximate figures for 1992-3 were:

A Key Stage 1 pupil	£1,000
A Key Stage 2 pupil	£800
A Key Stage 3 pupil	£1,450
A 14 year old pupil	£1,500
A 15 year old pupil	£1,700

These statistics amply confirm the Discussion Paper's reference to the funding "anomaly".

It is interesting to trace through the influence of the Discussion Paper and of the representations of the Buckinghamshire primary sector on this process, although, of course, it encompassed the Secondary and Special School sectors as well. The Buckinghamshire County Council's 'Reviewing AWPU' leaflet published in June lists three reasons for the review, one of which is "the Department for Education has published a discussion paper 'Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in

Primary Schools' which includes a reference to the pressures on primary school funding, particularly in relation to specialist teaching". The leaflet lists six issues which governors and headteachers are requested to consider and respond to. These include "The effect on the National Curriculum on class sizes and the amount of non-contact time required by staff in the school... and the implications in terms of other resources" and "What would be the effect of your school of more specialist teaching, as envisaged in 'Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools?'"

The Local Management Panel reported in November 1992. The main responses made to it by the primary sector were summarised. Most primary schools had commented that there was increased pressure on planning and record keeping as a result of the National Curriculum and "to relieve that pressure on teaching staff they believed there was a need for more non-contact time". Primary schools also advocated smaller class sizes to deliver the National Curriculum because in many cases they were having to teach children of significantly different abilities in the same class. Some smaller combined schools commented that this need was particularly acute where there were children from more than one year group in a class and sometimes these classes span more than one key stage. Representations from primary schools also asserted that "SATS had involved significant extra work for teachers and clerical assistants". This implied that there was a need for extra flexibility for schools to employ more teachers and other staff during periods where tests were being carried out. A large number of primary schools commented that local management had the effect of moving headteachers away from their curriculum leadership role and spending more time on administration. They argued for more clerical time to free headteachers from routine clerical and administrative tasks, like Campbell (1993). Schools also commented that there was an increased demand on reprographic facilities and therefore a need for more clerical assistant time. Finally, schools commented on the increased need for equipment and resources, particularly for science, technology, humanities and music. These five main areas of need identified by headteachers and governors reflect very closely the categories of enhanced resources recommended in *Achieving Quality*. It is, of course, true that the summary above was

prepared by officers of the county - and may not necessarily be an accurate reflection of primary responses. However, it is surprising that a justification for some of the resources is not closely linked to issues raised in the Discussion Paper. It is also noteworthy that there is no reference to the need for greater specialist teaching, particularly at Key Stage 2 and Year 7 in Buckinghamshire schools. It may be inferred that schools either believed this could be achieved within existing staffing or, more likely from the evidence of *Achieving Quality*, did not fully endorse the deployment of specialist teachers. This may be a manifestation of what the Discussion Paper terms "resistance to subjects" (Paragraph 3).

The Panel's recommendations which were accepted by the Education Committee in December were:

- "the Committee should make a first priority for any additional resources the AWPUs for the 5-11 age group (Key Stages 1 and 2) and the second priority the AWPUs for the 11-14 age group (Key Stage 2)"

- "it should not seek to effect a redistribution between AWPUs in the context of the likely budgetary situation in 1993/94".

The C.E.O. wrote letters to headteachers in December, January, February and March outlining the budget-making process and the pressures and constraints on the county's expenditure including the need to conform to the Standing Spending Assessment (SSA) calculated by government. In his letter of February 16 he reported that "the Policy and Resources Committee has concluded that it is possible to recommend to the County Council a budget of £1.5 m above the "nil growth option". Nevertheless, this was a severe disappointment for primary headteachers. They had achieved nothing more tangible than a resolution from the Local Management Panel as outlined above. Given the financial context the best they might have hoped for was for an improvement in the primary AWPUs compared with the secondary allocation. This did not happen and primary headteachers like Dooks could only wistfully say "I and a lot of my colleagues

have been arguing for two or more years for a better share of the AWPU for the primary sector". The county had been unable to fulfil the funding expectations of primary headteachers which had been raised in April 1992 at the Alexander address.

Conclusion

Buckinghamshire's response to the Discussion Paper in the year following its publication in January 1992 had been, as one headteacher put it, "active and swift". The C.E.O., officers and advisers intended that "something should happen" (Eyles 1992 interview). Martin spoke of the county's response to the Discussion Paper as "being core business" and necessary because "given the high profile it originally received from the media and the Secretary of State, to have done nothing would have left it in their hands". Sharp confirmed this view by saying "I think it is one of our main roles as an L.E.A. to bring things to schools in a challenging way but also to interpret things that are happening nationally and help schools in a re-examination of their professional practice". Mediating the Discussion Paper by "influencing things for good" (Sharp) was a high priority on the county's agenda. Smith, headteacher of a combined school, commented that "the county wished to show it had a role as a player on the stage".

The policies of the L.E.A. to achieve a robust response to the Discussion Paper were clear. There was to be a campaign of persuasion in both national and local arenas to enhance primary funding advocated in the Discussion Paper. The initial debate on professional issues which had begun spontaneously amongst teachers was to be channelled by the L.E.A. - firstly by Alexander's address and secondly by consultation with headteachers. The L.E.A. had decided in advance that the product of this consultation would be a document responding to the Discussion Paper which would be designed for schools and teachers but would also contribute to a document for governors and, possible, parents.

What actually happened reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of L.E.A.s in the current climate. The ability of an L.E.A. to persuade a prominent national figure like

Alexander to address headteachers and to give such a meeting high status was demonstrated. An L.E.A. can ensure that its headteachers are informed on current issues and developments. The regular letters from the C.E.O. to primary headteachers relating to the progress of the primary debate and to the related financial decisions, together with the section on 'The Primary Education Debate' in *The Second Annual Report* of the Chief Education Officer (paragraphs 38-43), are testimony to this. The L.E.A. was able to use its traditional partnership with schools to initiate and to sustain consultation. Sharp commented "I think L.E.A.s are still uniquely placed through advisory networks to enable other people to do things". However, the C.E.O. was mindful of Alexander's Leeds Report which he said was "critical of things being handed down by the L.E.A.". Members of the Advisory Service, because "schools are known and there are relationships" (Sharp), were able to assist the consultation process, particularly by planning and leading the meetings, but also by supporting the seconded headteachers. Sharp reported that "a considerable amount of time was given by advisers, which we were able to plan a term or two ahead to commit certain days". The county was also able to draw upon its links with other bodies like the National Primary Centre at Westminster College to contribute to the consultation. Resources, albeit relatively modest, were utilised to provide the accommodation for meetings to take place, the secondment of the headteachers and the printing of the publications. Most of the county's INSET courses for primary teachers from Easter 1992 had references to, and work on, the issues raised by the Discussion Paper. The Advisory Service prepared a 10 page pamphlet 'Some Headlines' which was a summary of the *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools Discussion Paper*. For example, this pamphlet was used as a basis for a course for curriculum co-ordinators and another for primary teachers on "classroom management and organisation" in June.

The county had initiated a response to the Discussion Paper. It had defined the product at the outset and set an agenda. It had co-ordinated the response and encouraged the contributions of all primary headteachers. At a crucial time for primary education it had

taken a lead and had, through its advisers with their knowledge of the county's schools and their contacts with headteachers, tried to ensure a collective response.

Yet weaknesses were apparent. The county, in the person of the C.E.O. speaking on behalf of the Association of County Councils, had been unable to persuade the Secretary of State to improve the funding for the primary sector. Moreover, the Buckinghamshire Education Committee, after intense lobbying and debate, did not enhance the delegated budgets of primary schools. This decision, as will be shown in the next chapter, caused considerable frustration and disappointment among primary headteachers. The expectations of primary headteachers of improved resources, voiced so vociferously at the Alexander meeting on April 3, had not been fulfilled. Buckinghamshire's position was entirely consistent with the finding of OFSTED (1993, p.17). "Many education committees have recognised the need for further funding to support new staffing arrangements, particularly at Key Stage 2, but very few have felt able to commit themselves to substantially higher funding for the primary phase in the foreseeable future". In addition, the most heralded and tangible product of the county's primary initiative, *Achieving Quality*, received a mixed reception as its purposes were confused and its utility limited. Indeed, it may even have been counter-productive as it seemed to close down rather than open up debate. The quality of the professional support and guidance given by the county to its authors may be questioned. The synopsis was potentially useful for headteachers and for widening "the debate by involving governing bodies" (OFSTED 1993, p.17), but the L.E.A. was dependent on its primary headteachers to mediate the synopsis effectively to their governors. The seven headteachers in the county who were consulted on this issue spoke of "overloaded agendas" and some admitted that they could not give the task of mediating the synopsis to the governors a high priority in view of the pressure of other issues and the time-lapse since the Discussion Paper was published. Some also implied that they were influenced by their disappointment with *Achieving Quality*. As one headteacher commented "It was water under the bridge as far as they are concerned. It went on the nod. I do feel a pang of conscience about it. I think I wasn't energetic or enthusiastic enough about it".

The London Boroughs Association's paper of March 1993 (p.1) asserted that "The Local Authority is uniquely placed to act as both a focus and a forum for the articulation and examination of educational issues..." Buckinghamshire, in respect of the issues raised in the Discussion Paper, had seized this opportunity but with mixed success. The LBA Paper, 1993 (p.4) also states that "Local authorities are keen to be involved in improving quality in schools and in identifying good practice through published information and direct involvement". There can be no doubt that the county through its 'three wise men initiative' was trying to improve quality in its primary schools, but it was unfortunate that *Achieving Quality* failed to identify 'good practice' adequately. The county had only partially succeeded in meeting a target for the future role and effectiveness of local authorities - "In order to secure the future of the Local Authority role in the education service local authorities must consistently make the case for their unique contribution to the future of local education" (LBA Paper, 1993, p.5).

Local authorities, although not renowned for their curriculum oversight, even after the 1986 (No. 2) Education Act, have been responsible for many, varied, curriculum initiatives in the post-war period. However, HMI (1992), Cordingley and Kogan (1993) and Morris (1993) have all commented on the recent decline in L.E.A. curriculum initiatives in the current context. Buckinghamshire's initiative in mediating the Discussion Paper went beyond a "minimalist" stance and, in spite of shortcomings, demonstrated a positive and useful Local Authority role.

Chapter 7: The impact of the Discussion Paper in schools and classrooms

The purpose of this chapter is to study the response to the Discussion Paper of headteachers and classteachers in schools. Since the Discussion Paper has been viewed as an attempt by Government to influence classroom practice it will be instructive to evaluate its impact on schools and in classrooms. The time-span of the study encompasses eighteen months between January 1992 and July 1993. Although educational changes are usually slow to show effects, the intention is to investigate the effect on teacher perspectives and whether there is some evidence of changes in classroom practice during this eighteen month period. However, one of the central problems is to disentangle the twin influences of the National Curriculum and the Discussion Paper. As one classteacher put it "I think the difficulty has been that the National Curriculum has run alongside and preceded the Three Wise Men's report. I think one is never sure as to whether it (change in the classroom) has been due to the National Curriculum or whether it has been the Three Wise Men".

I selected four primary schools which were well known to me as I had been Senior Adviser in the Chiltern and South Bucks area of the county for six years until December 1991. They were selected because of their inherent interest and differences in structure and in catchment area. I considered it useful to choose a twinned first and middle school in the predominantly residential area of Prestwood. The first school (five to eight) has 180 children while the middle school has 220 children aged eight to twelve. Little Kingshill Combined School (five to twelve) in a predominantly rural area is larger with 270 children, while Newtown First School has 190 children on roll drawn from an urban area of Chesham which has a multi-racial community. All schools were from the south of the county.

This chapter which will analyse aspects of the impact of the Discussion Paper in four sample schools is structured in three sections. Firstly the methods employed in collecting the data will be outlined. Secondly, the perspectives and policies of the four head teachers

will be analysed including their initial reactions to the Paper, their use of the Discussion Paper with their staffs with a concluding comment on their responses. Thirdly, the experience of the class teachers will be considered in relation to six of the major issues raised in the Discussion Paper:

- the use of a range of techniques in the classroom
- whole class teaching
- topic/subject approaches
- the number of activities in a classroom at any one time
- cognitive challenge
- assessment and recording

There will be an emphasis on teachers' classroom practices and their comments on their practices throughout.

Osborn and Broadfoot (1992) and Woods (1993) have identified various modes of adaptation by teachers and schools to the current changes in education. The main argument of this chapter will be that the responses of head teachers and class teachers are in the 'incorporation' or 'appropriation' mode. At times the tone of the Discussion Paper seemed to represent teachers as technicians. Although this could be viewed as an expression of intensification the teachers in this sample engaged with the Paper as professionals. It will be shown that both head teachers and class teachers made the Paper work for them. They remained in control selecting those recommendations from the Paper which suited or reinforced their own practice and ignoring or rejecting those which they deemed unacceptable or inappropriate.

Methods of assembling the data

Three interviews were undertaken with each of the four headteachers at intervals over the eighteen months. These were tape recorded and lasted for approximately 45 minutes. On most occasions I sent a list of topics which it would be useful to discuss in advance of the interview but this did not inhibit the headteachers presenting their own agendas. On four occasions a headteacher preferred not to be recorded. I undertook similar interviews in

the spring of 1992 and in the early summer of 1993 with the classteachers. One classteacher was interviewed in two of the schools while two teachers were interviewed in the other two schools. All six teachers had offered to participate in the research, after an invitation had been extended to all members of staff. This process of self-selection ensured that the teachers were willing participants in the research. However it also meant that questions might be raised about the representativeness of the sample. I was reassured by the initial exploratory, informal discussions with the six teachers. Not one greeted the Discussion Paper with uncritical acclaim or enthusiasm. Indeed two expressed misgivings relating to some aspects of the Paper and two were very ready to admit that their knowledge of it was sketchy and second hand since they had not read it. Thus it seemed that teachers' participation had been motivated by an interest in being consulted and involved in the research rather than the opportunity to promulgate a particular view of the Discussion Paper. Four of the six teachers are female. All are experienced primary teachers with at least 15 years service apart from Robin, who after working in the secondary sector has taught in a primary school for three years. Three of the teachers, Jenny, Colin and Janet, are full time class-teaching deputy headteachers. Informal conversations were undertaken with all six whenever there was an opportunity. A sustained period of observation - one day each week for one term - was undertaken with Gill and two hour sessions each with Ann and Janet. The six teachers, having volunteered to take part in the research, showed a high level of commitment. Collectively they represented $\frac{1}{6}$ of the total number of staff from the four schools.

Attendance at staff meetings provided a useful source of data. I was invited to a short staff INSET meeting at Newtown First School in March 1992 at which initial reactions to the Discussion Paper were voiced. In April 1992 and May 1993 I met the Prestwood First School staff for an hour after school. The second staff meeting on the impact and implications of the Discussion Paper was recorded. Headteachers kindly made relevant school documentation freely available including notes of staff meetings, memoranda prepared by the headteacher for staff, curriculum policy statements, school development plans and brochures for parents. Additional data from occasional interviews and

observation of classroom practices in four other primary schools in Buckinghamshire contributed to this study. These schools are Alex Campbell Middle School, Milton Keynes; The Allan Shaw Combined School, Steeple Claydon; Elangeni Middle School, Amersham and Cuddington C.E. First School. In January 1993 OFSTED published *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools - a follow-up report*. The findings of this report will be compared with those of the Discussion Paper whenever appropriate.

The Headteachers' perspective

Their initial reactions to the Discussion Paper

During the course of the first interviews - three in March and one in June 1992 - the four headteachers gave their initial reactions to the Discussion Paper. Three headteachers commented specifically on the Paper's criticism of "highly questionable dogmas" (p.1, para 3,2) associated with 'Plowdenism' (p.10, para 22). The response of Jeff Smith, head of Little Kingshill Combined School, was heartfelt: "My first reaction to it was of some distress. I felt it was emotive, provocative and knocked at the very foundations of primary practice". He argued that reference to "highly questionable dogmas" was "derogatory" and was not based on "reasoned research". He continued by suggesting that "phrases like the whole child, like child centred ... like active methods of learning, like children achieving their own potential, up until two years ago ... were the meat of job applications. These were what we put in school prospectuses. This is how we described our school to parents and this is what we discussed at professional meetings and to have, at a stroke, that whole system of thinking thrown out takes a little bit of getting used to". Jeff Smith went on to characterise the Discussion Paper as "a blatant attack on primary practice" and asserted that it advocated "a pragmatic and mechanistic view ... transmitting parcels of knowledge". He argued that "teachers are no longer seen as inspirational people developing potential, nurturing flowers to blossom but ... craftspeople making good products banging in the mass of the curriculum ... We are almost operators of a conveyor belt. We don't decide what goes in at the conveyor belt,

we just operate it". Jeff continued by saying "Maybe the National Curriculum will become more manageable and teachers' creativity may well flower again but we are certainly on a very utilitarian track at the moment". He concluded "I think the dilemma that heads and teachers are in now is 'Well, I thought Plowdenism was a good idea. We did our best to make it work. We are now told we didn't.' This document tells us all the things we did wrong but what should we be doing? This is not a positive model. This is a hatchet job". Trevor Dooks, Head of Prestwood Middle School, took up a similar theme and commented "The Plowden Report itself had a lot of excellent thinking and where it has been appropriately interpreted it has led to a lot of extremely fine primary practice". Thus the Discussion Paper's views on 'Plowdenism' had evoked criticism but the nature of the responses differed. Jeff Smith reacted with considerable emotion as he had a personal and professional stake in Plowden methods, whereas Trevor Dooks was more objective.

On the other hand, Jean Morgan, Head of Prestwood First School, was not critical of the Paper's stance on Plowden methods. She argued that the Paper was "very thorough and comprehensive and it seems fair in the judgements and comments made". Jean stated that the Paper advocated many practices already employed at Prestwood First School, including a variety of approaches in the classroom, a carefully planned curriculum, some emphasis on subject teaching and structured assessment. She approved of what she termed "balance" in the Paper - "I see the need to disassociate child-centred approaches from the idea of the Good and class teaching from the Bad". Jean also commended the Paper's "comments about subject specialisms for older children and approaches in schools and classrooms seem eminently sensible". Jean's favourable response to the Paper may be partly based on her belief that it validated existing practice in her school. However, not surprisingly, in view of the brief of the Discussion Paper with its emphasis on Key Stage 2, Jean asserted "My overall reaction is that it fits the junior age group in primary education more than the infant and I am left wondering whether we should not have another report from three wise women dealing with Years R, 1 and 2". Penny Joyce, Head of Newtown First School, agreed with her first school colleague that the Key Stage

2 emphasis in the Paper not only rendered it generally more appropriate to schools and teachers with older primary children but also resulted in an omission of "early years aspects, including the social development of children".

The headteachers also commented on the nature, status and authorship of the Paper. For example, Penny stated "It's another thing being thrown at us. We have been told what to teach and now we are about to be told how to teach it". Trevor discussed the same theme. Although he recognised that there was "nothing mandatory" in the Paper he considered it "a land-mark in primary education" and was concerned about "the element of prescription or likely prescription lurking behind it". He explained this anxiety by saying "I go back to the early days when the concept of a National Curriculum was mooted. It was said time and time again by government spokesmen that the National Curriculum is only about the content of the curriculum and assessment. But here we are four years later with a major governmental initiative going back on that position and intervening in classroom practices. I think that it is within reason and chance that a Secretary of State, if not this one, will be legislating on methodology in the primary classroom". It is clear that at least two of the headteachers were wary of this Government intervention into classroom practices. Although they appreciated that at this stage the Paper was concerned with guidance and recommendations there was a suspicion of possible future prescription in their minds. This concern was compounded in Jeff Smith's case by his view that the authors were not disinterested - "My feeling is that their brief was to come up with a counter to Plowden". Trevor also queried the credibility of the authors but on different grounds "It should not be forgotten that it was some years since they taught in primary classrooms. It would have been more impressive if a couple of primary heads had been on the panel". Penny Joyce was critical of the time-scale for the preparation of the Paper - "Surely it justified more time than a rushed job?" while Jean Morgan referred to the media reception "the press launch was largely another battering of teachers" and to the misgivings created by the articles by Alexander and Woodhead in *The Guardian* which "seemed to suggest they were not in agreement". These views of the four headteachers not only reflected much national comment but also revealed some

of the concerns which have impaired the credibility and the effectiveness of the impact of the Discussion Paper in schools.

Three of the headteachers referred to Section 8 of the Discussion Paper - 'The Primary School Headteacher: Effective Curriculum Leadership'. Penny Joyce commented "I believe that the head should be the educational leader but I am concerned that other things are pushing me out of that. Who will be the bursar?" This view was echoed in the OFSTED Report, (1993 p.11), which commented that "the majority (of headteachers) were still coming to terms with local management of schools". All three outlined their policy of trying to teach in their schools. Various motives were identified. Penny, for example, described how she had enjoyed concentrating on teaching for a week "being back in the classroom was wonderful. I cancelled every meeting". Jean asserted "I have chosen to teach for half of the week. My influence here is to show my colleagues they can do more formal teaching". However, Trevor commented "I teach not only because I want to set an example but also it is the only non-contact time the staff get because we can't afford to give them any other". Trevor took issue with the practicality of the recommendations of the Discussion Paper on the head's teaching role. He asserted "It has some quite strident comments to make about the extent to which heads should be teaching... and the authors have the gall to say this after the enormous flow of legislation with which heads have had to cope in the last five years. I do the equivalent of a day's teaching a week but it is difficult to keep to that - and I am frequently having to re-arrange the teaching at great inconvenience".

Although there was general agreement on the importance of the head's role as educational leader all four headteachers expressed the tensions inherent in trying to stretch their time and capabilities to fulfil their varied responsibilities. For example, Trevor stated "Trying to keep the two roles (curriculum leader and administrator identified in the Discussion Paper) going is an awful point of inner conflict. We know we want to do one and yet we are increasingly having to do the other. It is quite unrealistic for the 'Three Wise Men' to express such strong opinions on this issue without attempting a resolution of it".

During the course of their interviews the headteachers gave interesting glimpses of their leadership styles. For example, Jean Morgan stated "If you are going to be a leader it is far better to get other people to do their thing and to bring out the best in them if you can. If you want to change things I don't think you do it by telling people how to do it. I think you go in and say "I make rotten Victoria sponges. How do you do it?" Penny Joyce spoke of a similar approach. She declared her watchword in supporting staff was "Let's go on together, rather than you aren't doing". She described an episode in a staff meeting with particular pleasure - "We patted ourselves on the back when we considered the paragraph (in the Discussion Paper) that said 'Policy should emerge from collective staff discussions. It should be modified in the light of experience and be complemented by detailed schemes of work'. We all said we thought we were doing all right at that, so we were pleased".

Trevor Dooks also gave indications of his style of leadership. A significant aspect of this was to take decisions to protect staff. "I have tried to protect them and they've needed it. When you think about all the material that's come in to schools over the last three years, it's had to be sifted. So what I have tried to do is to distinguish as the months have gone on between things that really have to be done by the staff and would benefit the children's education and those things which can either wait indefinitely or at least wait some months". Trevor asserted "I am determined as a head to introduce the National Curriculum at our pace and not the Government's pace. We will do it in our time." Trevor concluded by saying "When you look at the content of the National Curriculum you realise that it is impossible to deliver. It is far too detailed and far too heavy. So there are large areas of each subject in the National Curriculum that we don't pretend to cover. So I say to the staff we have got to cover as much of the National Curriculum as is reasonably possible".

Unsurprisingly, all four headteachers commented favourably on the Paper's recommendations for enhanced funding for primary education (p.5 para 5). Both Penny and Jean stressed the urgent need for smaller classes. For example, Jean asserted "I

would like to see them (the L.E.A.) put the money in giving us smaller classes and letting us get on with it. Nearly all problems are reduced if classes are small". Department for Education statistics (D.F.E., 1991) confirm that Buckinghamshire had one of the least favourable teacher-pupil ratios in primary schools and there were 215 classes with 41 or more pupils in primary schools in the county. These figures also indicate that throughout the country over a quarter of all primary children are being taught in classes larger than 30. Jeff Smith stated "I do feel the financial aspect is important. If I was thinking optimistically I might think that Stephen Sharp might use the Paper to lever more resources ..." Trevor Dooks endorsed this view - "Buckinghamshire middle schools are deemed primary schools and their share of the A.P.W.U. reflects this. The primary sector generally is under-funded for meeting the needs of the National Curriculum. The average primary teacher has hardly any non-contact time ... the primary schools have no technicians to support staff with preparing materials. Now all that compares very unfavourably with the secondary sector".

These views on the inadequate funding of primary schools were supported by Alexander (1993) who argued that there could be no justification for the considerably larger classes in primary schools, or for the gross disparities in non-contact time between primary and secondary teachers, or for the chronic imbalance in books and equipment, or for the way primary schools were relatively starved of incentive allowances. Byers (1993), Labour M.P. for Wallsend and former education Chair of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, reports that in a response to his parliamentary questions, he was informed that in England 50% more was spent on each secondary pupil compared with primary.

None of the four headteachers referred directly to the issue raised in the Discussion Paper relating to the advisability of maintaining the generalist classteacher system. However all four, with varying degrees of emphasis, agreed with Trevor's view that the Discussion Paper "is breaking new ground with the concept of semi-specialist and specialist-teaching in the primary sector, although it would not have been so extensive if it had not been made necessary by the National Curriculum". Although the headteachers did not oppose

this concept, each voiced concerns over practicalities. For example, Penny Joyce stated that if additional funding became available her priority would be to release staff in order to develop their roles as subject co-ordinators: "You have to give people the time to be able to utilise their specialism and to let it permeate through the school and to pass their subject knowledge on to their colleagues". Jeff agreed - "to implement what is recommended about subject specialists we need more resources" and Trevor stressed the necessity of a county and a national INSET programme to enhance the specialist capability of teachers." These views were in line with the findings of the OFSTED Report (1993 p.19) which argued that "financial limitations rather than ideological objections" were inhibiting specialist and semi-specialist developments.

Finally all four headteachers asserted that some of the recommendations of the Paper were currently present in primary schools. For instance, Trevor stated "a lot of good schools are employing a wide range of teaching methods" while Penny and Jean argued that most staffs in schools were planning collaboratively to ensure progression and continuity with systematic assessment. The headteachers were well aware of the Discussion Paper and perceived it as a positive contribution to professional debate, although they had reservations and misgivings about some of its views and recommendations. Moreover, at the time the Paper was published headteachers were involved in implementing the National Curriculum and other Government legislation like delegated financial management. As Penny stated "I do think that primary schools have got too much being thrown at them at the moment".

Headteachers' use of the Discussion Paper with their staffs

Scarth in his interview commented, "The headteacher determines the agenda". Jeff Smith, for instance, judged it inexpedient to foster a staff debate based on the Discussion Paper. He told me in March 1992 that "I would be very reluctant to embark on reviewing classroom practice". He had only been in post at Little Kingshill Combined School for a term and he believed, at that stage, the staff which had undergone some changes in personnel would not benefit from such a debate. Jeff, as has been shown, was critical of

the statements in the Discussion Paper on Plowden methods and argued that the teaching methods in the school were "formal enough" and that a debate on the Discussion Paper would probably reinforce existing practice. He commented "The so-called progressive revolution, if it ever took place, was certainly held at bay at Little Kingshill and the School flourished by its reluctance to embrace any of the 'questionable dogmas'. Whole class teaching has remained the predominant method of delivery. Single subject teaching has remained the dominant method of delivery. Group work and individual work have been little used". Although he wished to initiate reform, he judged that "It (the Discussion Paper) would actually be used as a stick with which to beat me as a defence for past practice" so at this stage he decided not to use it with staff.

Jeff believed his priorities, in the early months of his second headship, lay in improving the school buildings and resources and fostering staff morale and collaboration. In this latter respect he reported that he might consider using aspects of the Discussion Paper. Later he hoped to enhance the staff's planning processes - "continuity and progression are valid features in an educational programme" and to develop "systematic and vigorous assessment practices". Jeff Smith also intended to review the role of curriculum co-ordinator in the school - "We need to address the whole notion of curriculum co-ordinator development before we go anywhere. There are people who organise books and run stock cupboards and write reports for governors on curriculum areas, but we do not have people plotting a curriculum area across the school and setting direction and so on". Jeff argued that the Discussion Paper might prove useful in developing these collaborative staff policies but sustained reflection on classroom practice would take place much later - "At this stage I don't think we are in a position to make a critical and reasoned response. When we are a bit more stable we might be able to start thinking about classroom practice". In view of this Jeff did not intend to give the Discussion Paper high priority on his governors' agenda. "I certainly have no intention of making a major governor issue out of this. I have given a copy to the Chairman of Governors as a duty. I certainly won't make more of it". In April 1993 Jeff reported that the Discussion Paper had "made

little impact" on his staff but had contributed in some degree to development in the areas he had identified a year before.

In the later interviews with Jeff Smith in November 1992 and April 1993 it was apparent that his strongly critical views on the Discussion Paper had been modified. Although he reported that the criticism of Plowden practices had "left its mark like a nail in the coffin" he had been fighting many battles and many other issues had arisen since". He commented that he had also been influenced by Professor Alexander's address at Misbourne School which had reassured him because of "its moderation". He indicated that he was, by nature, pragmatic and the requirements of the National Curriculum had forced him to examine and to modify his position. For example, he commented that "subject teaching was now an everyday occurrence in primary schools". He saw signs that his staff were "more ready to consider classroom practice" and at staff meetings at the end of the Summer Term 1993, although he wished to initiate reform, he judged it appropriate to encourage this development.

Each of the three other headteachers adopted similar strategies for managing the Discussion Paper with their staffs. For example, Jean Morgan viewed the Discussion Paper as an opportune source of authority. "Although there is nothing extreme that needs altering here, I decided this year there must be more direct classroom teaching. It (the Discussion Paper) gives support to those teachers who feel anxious about direct teaching - it gives them permission. Instead of coming from me - it is nice to have a book". Each of the three headteachers decided to put the Discussion Paper as a major item on the agenda of the next staff INSET day, although these INSET programmes had already been arranged for the school year. Both Prestwood staffs had their meetings in April, at the beginning of the Summer Term 1992, while the Newtown staff met in June 1992. The three headteachers had a similar aim which was "to explore staff opinion" and each prepared a synopsis of the Discussion Paper with, in two cases, an additional commentary for their staffs. Each headteacher had specific objectives. As we have seen, Jean's major concern was to encourage and endorse class teaching. She also had other purposes. She

wanted to foster debate about a creative use of specialist expertise - "the report gave me support in some notions and the staff will also be quite interested in experimenting with new things". Through the medium of staff debate she was hoping to sow seeds of ideas which would bear fruit later. Meanwhile one of Trevor Dooks' intentions was "to sound out views on a possible move towards a specialist or semi-specialist approach to teaching". Although he had some misgivings about this - "the tendency has been to retreat to a subject based approach", he argued that National Curriculum imperatives were necessitating such a change in middle schools and that "it's a move which, to some extent, we have agreed to in this school". He added "at the moment all primary schools are staffed by non-specialist classteachers. They have not been trained to be specialists so there has got to be funding for in-service work. We need to talk about that". Penny Joyce was anxious to inform her staff generally about the Discussion Paper - "it is something of a hot potato in the press and we as educationalists need to be aware". She intended to encourage discussion of its major implications from the perspective of "What does it mean for us?" Penny was confident: "I think it (the Discussion Paper) is a good mechanism to help us to discuss what we are doing. It can be used productively". In addition, she had a specific objective. Curriculum planning and delivery at Newtown First School are largely based on the topic approach. She wanted to use staff discussion to explore "whether we are doing our topics justice... in the light of the Three Wise Men".

The consequences of these INSET discussions were seminal in all three schools. Jean Morgan's advocacy of whole-class teaching was well received. As she spoke there was a palpable expression of relief, even emancipation, amongst the staff. Ann, a classteacher, argued strongly that "class teaching was not approved of by the powers that be" and that if in the past a visitor - a parent or an adviser from the county - came into her classroom she would hope she was not class teaching but "would try to make sure she was operating a lively classroom with children working in groups on varied activities". As Alexander (1992) has shown, Ann is not alone in this view. Many primary teachers believe that the current orthodoxy is critical of whole class teaching. The staff also considered the issue

of teacher specialism in relation to the requirements of the National Curriculum. Although they concluded that the problem in first schools lies less with teacher knowledge and more with the **intensity** of the teachers' day they were ready to explore new structures like setting and the employment of a teacher's expertise - for example in music and art - with more than one class. Staff were very open to the ideas in the Discussion Paper mediated by their headteacher. It was agreed, for example, that the role of curriculum co-ordinators should be developed. It was accepted that formerly they had had a restricted conception of the role based largely on management of resources. Now there would be an emphasis on disseminating subject expertise. The staff agreed that the recommendations of the Discussion Paper in Section 4 were "practical and reasonable" and "the use of the most appropriate method was sensible advice". The collective view to whole class teaching was perhaps best summed up by one teacher, who commented "the fear of not being trendy has been removed". In this way the Paper legitimised an existing practice.

Meanwhile at Prestwood Middle School, Trevor Dooks had listed "the main and the most contentious recommendations in the report" as a basis on which to explore staff opinion. He believed that his summary document had enabled his colleagues to focus on specific issues. For example, the staff had debated the efficacy of specialist science, maths and music teaching in Year 7 and the possibility of a pilot scheme in setting maths in Year 5. The challenge of how to disseminate the expertise of curriculum co-ordinators was also considered. Trevor reported that staff debate had convinced him that inadequate funding "remains the major problem in primary schools. The government ignores that message at its peril. Schools are being asked to do an impossible job and they can't do it and each day we are breaking the law. We haven't got the resources, particularly the staffing, to achieve the National Curriculum."

Penny Joyce reported that the Newtown staff had engaged in a consideration of topic work. They had scrutinised their planning and practice in the light of the 'recommendations of the Discussion Paper'. It had been agreed that subjects like maths,

science, P.E. and, even history and geography, were now being planned and taught with a greater subject emphasis on classrooms in the school. Various questions were asked - did the teaching adequately stretch the children? Was the planning and assessment sufficiently structured? What were the effects of delivering a broader curriculum on the core subjects? The particular challenges of lack of classteacher non-contact time, of "the highly complex assessment procedures", of large, sometimes mixed age, classes and of children in the first year of Key Stage 2 in first schools, were discussed. The response of the school to its children of Asian descent, often with language difficulties, was also considered. It was agreed to continue with the current amalgam of both topic and single subject planning, to explore any possibility of music expertise as this was a major staff concern, with the implementation of the National Curriculum Order in September 1992. It was also agreed to keep the topic issue under review. Penny, reflecting on the day, commented that it confirmed her in her view that the key twin priorities were the needs of the staff and the pupils and the requirements of the National Curriculum. In contrast, "the recommendations of the Three Wise Men's report came a poor third". She also spoke warmly of her staff's ability to work collaboratively.

Thus, the headteachers, in their initial reactions to, and use of, the Discussion Paper with their staffs, had fulfilled and illustrated the role of "gatekeeper" (Lyons, 1981 p.153). The head teachers were able to use their position to determine how and, to what extent, their teaching staff received, interpreted and implemented the Discussion Paper. Jeff Smith's professional judgement had been to keep the Paper largely off his staff's agenda as he considered it inopportune. On the other hand, Jean, Trevor and Penny had decided that their staffs should discuss the Paper and become more familiar with its recommendations. Nevertheless the staff meetings were carefully managed to ensure that, in each case, not only was the headteacher's agenda followed, but some of his/her policies for the future were validated by the nature of staff debate and by the recommendations of the Discussion Paper. The implementation and the effectiveness or otherwise of these policies will be considered in the following section.

Examples of headteacher initiatives influenced largely or partly by the Discussion Paper

The role of curriculum co-ordinator

All four headteachers were determined to enhance the role of the curriculum co-ordinator. The Discussion Paper (pp. 42-45) characterises "the current norm" as "the model of the generalist classteacher aided by the curriculum co-ordinator". In theory at least this objective could be achieved with the least change and resources. However, in practice, it proved difficult. Although all four schools had detailed statements on the role of the curriculum co-ordinator and staff awareness had been enhanced by discussions in staff meetings, the main stumbling block was lack of non-contact time. Alexander et al (1992) identified its key problem in paragraph 143. The role of curriculum co-ordinator had been established in each of the four schools for some time mainly prompted by H.M.I. Reports and D.E.S. INSET accreditation criteria as well as by advice and guidance from the county's advisory service. On the whole, as asserted in paragraph 79 of the Discussion Paper, curriculum co-ordinators in the four schools had "had a significant impact upon both whole school curriculum planning and the management of resources but had little real influence on the competence of individual teachers and the quality of classroom teaching and learning". For example, Penny Joyce identified the main problem - "It is difficult to use our curriculum expertise without regular and substantial non-contact time being available". Each headteacher reported that funding pressures had made it almost impossible to release curriculum co-ordinators regularly - indeed the most common solution was for the headteacher to take over the curriculum co-ordinator's class for her/him to work in another teacher's classroom for a particular purpose on an ad hoc basis. In addition, there was the problem in the two relatively small first schools of securing adequate consultancy in all subjects (Discussion Paper, para 143). It was common for some teachers in these schools to have at least two subjects assigned to them. It is likely that the implementation of the National Curriculum alone would have resulted in a reappraisal of the curriculum co-ordinator's role. Nevertheless

the headteachers and staff in all four schools utilised the comments and recommendations made in the Discussion Paper to heighten awareness and to inform their discussions.

OFSTED (1993, p.11), confirmed that "Lack, or poor use, of non-contact time" remained the main inhibitor of the effectiveness of curriculum co-ordinators.

Setting schemes

The Discussion Paper (p.27, para 85) characterises streaming as "a crude device" but recommends grouping according to ability as "a more flexible device in that it allows the teacher to place a pupil in a particular ability group for a particular purpose". One school undertook a pilot scheme in setting mathematics in Year 5 and another was planning a setting scheme in reading for Years 2 and 3 for the new school year in September 1993. Trevor Dooks and his colleagues had decided to mount a pilot maths setting scheme in Year 5 at the beginning of the autumn term 1992. The staff decided to set on a limited basis in a single subject as "an experiment". Trevor stated that, to some extent, "it had been legitimised by the Three Wise Men". Year 5, comprising two classes, possessed not only the largest year group but some children with behaviour problems and a large number with difficulties in mathematics. The year group had been divided into two sets for mathematics - one large set with the ablest children and a smaller set of the less able - for one hour a week. Trevor commented on his initial evaluation of the pilot scheme. He had been anxious to restrict the scheme to one hour a week "because we were not certain about its effects". He argued that its results were positive in the sense that the children's progress in maths seems to be speeding up in both groups. However, he still had reservations "about putting a child in what is obviously a number two set". He described the changes in classroom strategies. Robin, who taught the smaller group, had been able "to do a lot more individual work and to use maths equipment". Beverley "with very nearly forty has gone in the opposite direction and has reverted to a very formal system of teaching". However, he concluded that both children and teachers had benefited from "a more homogeneous grouping". The headteacher had considered the possibility of movement of children between sets but that had not yet been deemed appropriate. He

had also considered timetabling himself to teach some of the children in a newly created third set but had been prevented from doing this by higher priorities. Trevor concluded "It (the pilot scheme) was the school's response to a particular problem" and might not be repeated. The major impetus had come from the "abnormally high number of children with difficulties in that year group" not directly from the recommendations of the Discussion Paper. Nevertheless, the school now had some experience of many of the advantages and disadvantages of setting and will be in a more informed position to review possible strategies - including setting - in the future.

Meanwhile another setting initiative was being planned at Prestwood First School. During the course of the academic year 1992-3 Jean Morgan had become concerned about reading in the school. She had noted that less time was being devoted to core work because of the broadening of the curriculum. In addition, classteachers had commented on the wide ranges of capability in reading in each class. At a staff meeting in May Jean presented her proposals to her colleagues. She suggested setting Years 2 and 3 for reading from the Autumn Term 1993. The 74 children in Years 2 and 3 would be divided into three sets - the able readers (30), the middle ability readers (24) and the less able readers in a small set of 14. The sets would operate for one hour after lunch for 4 days a week. She outlined her many arguments for the scheme - each teacher would have a recognised and restricted band of reading ability, "a narrower band of concern", each classteacher would be assigned to the set of her choice wherever possible and the smaller set for the slower readers would facilitate an individual remedial programme. There was an initial reaction of surprise and concern among her colleagues. Jean asserted that the classteacher system in first schools was not "a sacred cow". However, some misgivings were voiced relating to a possible loss of continuity in the children's language programme. After the discussion it was agreed that for the scheme to succeed effective liaison between class and set teacher in respect of each child's progress on reading would be essential. One teacher argued that it would be beneficial for a child to experience at least two teachers during the week. Other issues debated included the management of reading resources for the setting scheme and the nature of the programme during 'set'.

time. It was agreed that other language activities like writing should not be precluded from the 'set' programme. During discussion reference was made to the Discussion Paper's recommendations for support and legitimisation. No decision was taken at this meeting, although it was agreed that it would be too much of an upheaval to try a limited reading pilot scheme during the later part of the summer term. Later, at a staff meeting in June, it was decided to proceed with the scheme. The staff agreed that precise objectives, content and assessment would need to be passed between each set teacher and the classteachers, and care would need to be taken to distinguish between "slow and young readers". The criteria for allocating the children to sets would have to be clear - particularly to parents.

Strengthening subject expertise

At the two first schools the same challenge of implementing the National Curriculum music Order met with contrasting responses. The intention was to strengthen or to maximise curriculum expertise as recommended in Section VII of the Discussion Paper. At Newtown First School Penny Joyce seized an opportunity to fill a gap in staff expertise and to enhance staff confidence in music. A parent who was a music specialist and a trained teacher with experience in secondary schools had been coming into school for some time as a volunteer to run a music club and to help with school concerts. From the beginning of the Autumn Term 1992 her expertise was used on a wider basis. Woods (1993) has analysed the contribution of "critical others" in the classroom. The input of this volunteer music specialist was both varied and invaluable. She worked regularly with two classes and the nursery each term sometimes to lead, sometimes to support the classteacher in musical activities. She also organised musical presentations at the end of each term involving children playing guitars, recorders and percussion instruments. For example, at the end of the Spring Term 1993 she organised a music concert for parents for which she wrote a piece of music 'Here come the Daffodils!' at which the children who had learnt to play musical instruments performed. She also joined the staff in meetings to assist in re-writing the school's music curriculum policy in the context of the

music Order. Penny Joyce commented "She has given a real boost to our music. Staff confidence has grown and she has shown in practical ways how to achieve progression in music".

Meanwhile at Prestwood First School Jean Morgan initiated a rather different response to the challenge of National Curriculum music, drawing on expertise within the school. She was responding directly to the recommendation in the Discussion Paper to enhance staff competence in subject areas of the National Curriculum. From the beginning of the Autumn Term 1992 the Deputy Headteacher, Janet, who possesses considerable expertise in music, has been teaching this subject to the other five classes in the school as well as her own, each for about 30 minutes a week. While she is teaching a colleague's class music the teacher she has released teaches her class an agreed specialism. For example, two of her colleagues contribute to her class's maths curriculum while another offers drama. This arrangement has worked well during the academic year with general satisfaction. It is a product of the collaborative climate at the school. Jean Morgan argues for a realistic audit of "staff strengths and weaknesses" and that the delivery as well as the planning of the curriculum should be collaborative. The challenge was identified early "when the music curriculum came in we realised that some people might have problems". Janet commented "We are happy to off-load subjects that we are not good at" and "I like teaching music right through the school because I enjoy it and the others don't feel very confident or competent". This music initiative illustrates a straightforward strategy for maximising specialist expertise. The headteacher and staff, following advice in the Discussion Paper, were prepared to experiment to challenge the classteacher system. Jean Morgan argues that the potential loss of continuity in the classes - especially Janet's - can be minimised by careful measures applied as a direct response to that possibility and that there are considerable benefits for the children who experience the expertise and enthusiasm of a specialist as well as more than one teacher. Moreover, she contends that "it enables teachers to work with a larger number of children in the school and to general staff togetherness".

Summary of the headteachers' responses

The impact of the Discussion Paper on four primary headteachers in schools in one area of Buckinghamshire has been evaluated over eighteen months. It is likely that the full influence will take much longer to be felt and it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the Discussion Paper from other factors. The Discussion Paper was only one item in a large agenda for schools. It represented one element in a sea of change. Its particular significance was that the recommendations related directly to class room practice although unlike most of the other government measures it was not a legal prescription. The priority of the headteachers during the period under review was to manage the implementation of the National Curriculum which is a legal requirement. There were many other pressing issues on headteachers' agendas - not least managing their own budgets. Moreover, various other factors contributed to limiting its influence with headteachers. As we have seen, heads discerned certain contradictions and ambiguities in the 'message' of the Discussion Paper and its origins and reception by the media did nothing to allay suspicions. There was a concern at its judgements, particularly relating to its criticism of "Plowdenism". Although Alexander achieved some success in emphasising its moderation and reassuring headteachers during his Misbourne address in April the publication of the county's *Achieving Quality* in September 1992 did not succeed in re-fuelling the debate. Moreover, headteachers had hoped that the Discussion Paper's recommendations on funding the primary sector might have borne fruit in either county or country or both. Penny Joyce declared "there is no flesh on the bones". This disappointment further restricted the impact of the Discussion Paper. However, in the final analysis, the Paper was not mandatory. With so much legislation to put into practice perhaps it was not surprising that headteachers invoked the Paper only when they believed it was appropriate to the interests of their school.

Three headteachers, for example, quickly seized the opportunity to bring the Paper to the attention of their staffs at staff INSET meetings, although the Discussion Paper was published in January and the staff INSET programme had been planned for the academic

year. However, the agenda in this debate was controlled by the headteacher who had specific outcomes in mind. The organisational initiatives practised or planned by headteacher and staff were adopted as a direct response to the need to strengthen and to maximise curriculum expertise. Although the major impetus came from the imperatives of the National Curriculum, nevertheless the Discussion Paper was used by the headteachers not only to stimulate and to inform discussion but to validate the strategies adopted like a greater use of class teaching, enhancing the role of the curriculum co-ordinators, setting and specialist teaching. The headteachers asserted that these developments had all been undertaken within existing resources. All agreed that enhanced staffing would offer opportunities for improving non-contact time (essential for hard pressed class teachers and for maximising the specialist expertise of curriculum co-ordinators) and would encourage a more whole-hearted response to some of the recommendations in the Discussion Paper. Eventually, as has been shown, the fourth head teacher, Jeff Smith, introduced the Discussion Paper to his staff when he judged the time was right. Although his initial critical reaction to the paper had been, to some extent, modified he was nevertheless prepared to use it as a resource in spite of his reservations relating to its tone, standpoint and recommendations.

The headteachers had demonstrated many of the qualities in "educational leadership" recommended by the Discussion Paper in a difficult arena with considerable educational change and with limited resources.

The experience of class teachers

Their initial reactions

This section will survey the initial reactions of six class teachers to the Discussion Paper and will then consider certain aspects of their practices in relation to the recommendations of the Paper. Prominence will be given throughout to the 'voice' of the teachers although, of course, the ordering of, and commentary on, their views are mine.

Pollard (1992) has commented on the pace and intensity of change for primary class teachers. It is in this context of the implementation of the National Curriculum that the impact of the Discussion Paper on six class teachers will be considered over an eighteen month period from January 1992 to July 1993. All six teachers would agree with Ann who stated "I think that the priority over the last few years has been to make oneself au fait with the next National Curriculum document that comes along" although the class teachers reported that it is very difficult to identify and then to differentiate between the sources of change in primary classrooms they all asserted that the major impetus came from the National Curriculum which is a legal requirement, not from the Discussion Paper.

Much recent research, for example Campbell et al (1991) and Webb (1993) has been related to a particular key stage. In this study four of the teachers were collectively engaging all years in the Key Stages 1 and 2 with the exception of Year 1 and Year 6. Additionally, in Buckinghamshire the first year of Key Stage 3 takes place in combined or middle schools which are deemed primary. Two of the teachers were teaching Year 7 classes.

Name	Age	School	Class	Incentive Allowance
Ann	44	Prestwood First School	Year 2	A
Colin	45	Prestwood Middle School	Year 7	Deputy Head
Gill	42	Newtown First School	Year 2/3	A
Janet	58	Prestwood First School	Year 3	Deputy Head
Jenny	47	Little Kingshill Combined School	Year 7	Deputy Head
Robin	36	Prestwood Middle School	Year 5	B

The Paper's recommendation for enhanced funding for the primary sector was supported. Colin, for example, approved of "the Paper's statement that primary education was

underfunded" and added "We all hoped that some action would be taken on that, either nationally or locally". He concluded sadly "the effect has been non-existent". Robin, from the same school, took up the same theme and was critical that the three authors had not been more forceful and specific in their resource recommendations. Robin, like Hargreaves (1990) identified time as a key resource for the teacher and argued that more emphasis should have been laid on the necessity for more non-contact time for teachers - "They do not mention time as an important factor but if they do it is always in the same breath as the word efficiency. The implication is that if you are an efficient teacher you can manage with the time you have got. I dispute that very strongly. We are chronically short of time for preparation and assessment". Robin went on to argue that the Discussion Paper should have recommended smaller class sizes - "I can vouch for this from experience. I have 31 now and last year I had 25. That six makes an enormous difference in educational terms. It's a quantum leap. I felt a bit sour that this issue was avoided".

There was concern among two teachers who argued, like Simon (1992), that the Discussion Paper did not sufficiently challenge or fundamentally question the National Curriculum as currently constituted. Colin said "I think the National Curriculum has got faults in content and in structure that make it extremely difficult. One of the problems I find with 'The Three Wise Men's Report' is the implication from the word go that everything was set in concrete. The implication was that there was nothing wrong with the National Curriculum". Robin stated "I don't think in its present state the National Curriculum is possible to deliver". Colin took his argument further and asserted "We are putting the cart before the horse. We should start with what we want in primary education and then apply a National Curriculum to it not 'Here is the National Curriculum - how do we bend primary education so it suits'". These comments from the class teachers suggest that they were prepared to engage professionally with innovation. Although, at times, the tone of the Discussion Paper implied that teachers were viewed as technicians their responses were not in that mode. However, as Riley (1992, p.2) suggests, perhaps the most that can be expected is "to incorporate the National

Curriculum into primary philosophy with holistic learning at its heart". The views of Colin and Robin in relation to the manageability of the National Curriculum have been borne out by reports from the National Curriculum Council (1993) and OFSTED (1993) as well as by Campbell (1993). There was a palpable sense of disappointment in the teachers that the three authors had not seriously questioned the manageability of the National Curriculum. This may have contributed to negative feelings towards the Discussion Paper. There were other criticisms of the Discussion Paper. Gill, for example, reported how aspects of the Paper caused her to "bristle". During the course of the interviews, the six teachers gave examples of the aspects of the Paper which had caused them concern. For example, Gill, like her headteacher, was critical that the Paper was "done in a rush" in six weeks. Robin raised doubts in relation to the credibility of the authors - "Even if you have taught in a primary school 20 years ago you are not qualified to comment on primary school teaching". He was also concerned that the three authors did not consult teachers during the preparation of the Paper. Two teachers commented adversely on the popular description of the authors as the "Three Wise Men". Although the authors had this nickname thrust upon them it nevertheless conferred an authority which proved offensive to some.

Colin explained his initial interest in the Discussion Paper in the context of Secretary of State Clarke's public view of teachers and teaching in primary schools. "I gave it a lot of attention when it was published because I was very interested in what it had to say, because of it being instigated by a Secretary of State who indicated he was going to act pretty rapidly on whatever result there happened to be from the 'Three Wise Men's Report'. So it seemed to me it was important to be informed on that". Robin also drew attention to what he termed the "political" dimension. He stated that "It (the Paper) had a hidden agenda. I think there were certain things the Secretary of State expected to come out of this and, of course, to make a meal of in the press. The things he wanted to make stick with the public were emphasised and a lot of the positive aspects of the report were not mentioned. I think it affected me in a most negative way". Ann, when interviewed in early February 1992 before she had a copy of the Discussion Paper, spoke of "the

constant brickbats of reports (on teachers) in the press" and with reference to the Discussion Paper said "I have only seen reports in the press but it has added to my worries". She admitted "For the first time in my whole teaching life I feel demoralised". Gill also reported that the media reception of the Paper had been manipulated in such a way as "to criticise teachers". There was also a view amongst the teachers that the timing was inopportune in view of the pace of change and the increased workloads on teachers (Campbell et al, 1991). Jenny reported that a common view with teachers was "Oh, another thing getting at us. They are pushing something else on us when we haven't really time to look through and read it". Robin, in the same vein, argued that primary teachers "have got enough on their plates" and do not want "to be distracted from the work in hand". From the evidence of the teachers, in common with headteachers, it seems clear that there were serious misgivings in relation to the Discussion Paper's origins and commissioning, its authorship and its presentation by the media.

Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of this reaction none of the six teachers referred directly to the Discussion Paper's statement on "highly questionable dogmas" and only Colin responded at any length to the Paper's criticism of "Plowdenism". He asserted "To criticise a methodology in itself is a bit absurd. It's when that methodology is the only one that any teacher is using that it becomes worthy of criticism". This assertion embodies a fine distinction from which it is unlikely that the three authors would dissent. It is possible that the other teachers did not highlight this issue because they did not consider such criticism was directed at their schools. For example, Ann said "I personally don't know of any school that has ever gone totally to Plowden methods. I have never had experience of them. So where they are I don't know". This view has been supported by research, including Galton and Simon (1980). Janet stated "We feel the criticisms made (of Plowden practices) do not apply to this school".

The initial reactions of the six teachers to the Discussion Paper have been considered. The intention is now to consider aspects of their practice in relation to the recommendations of the Discussion Paper.

The use of a range of techniques in the classroom

The Discussion Paper recommends that "a range of techniques" (paras 3.6, 103, 125) is employed in the classroom. This present study will confirm Webb's (1993) research which showed that primary teachers do not conform to "simplistic stereotypes" but use a wide diversity of approaches in the classroom.

All six teachers reported that they employed "a mixture of techniques" (Gill) in their classrooms. For example, Colin asserted that the emphasis on using a range of techniques in the Discussion Paper was "absolutely obvious and reasonable". He commented "I mean any professional is going to say 'Well, what is the best way in this situation to do this particular task?' and if they have got a gamut of approaches then they can choose the best one. For example, there are times when it is appropriate for children to work individually and other times it is very appropriate to be teaching the whole class".

Robin's experience was particularly interesting in relation to the use of "a range of techniques" in the classroom. He explained that he had taught in secondary schools for 13 years and had moved to his present primary school three years ago. He declared "I am still learning the primary craft", but as a specialist P.E. teacher he had attended two courses on teaching styles. He explained "When I saw this (the recommendation on using a range of techniques) in the 'Three Wise Men's Report' it rang a bell. I am lucky in the sense that I have a P.E. background and physical education is a little ahead of other subjects in teaching styles". He then described the two courses he had attended which were based on the work of Mostyn, an American researcher - "We were introduced to the teaching styles from A to J starting with the complete didactic right down to style J where you are encouraging the children to try out different things for themselves and they assess whether or not they have succeeded". He continued "We looked very closely at how the different teaching styles might be used with different children... when safety aspects are paramount more didactic styles are needed but at other times it may be better if they discovered things for themselves". Robin concluded, by referring to his present practice, "I am not saying that I am employing all my different range of teaching styles in the most

appropriate way for each child on every occasion. I do my best. I am aware at least that there are times when it would be better to ask a lot of questions and at other times it would be better to tell the children what to do".

The six teachers reported that the recommendations of the Discussion Paper on using a range of techniques had not influenced their practices but had legitimised them. For example, Ann commented that she felt "comfortable" with this aspect of the guidance in the Paper. "They seem to have accepted moderation in all things. There is a place for different types of teaching...", while Jenny stated "I feel for me at a personal level it justified what I have been doing". Colin, however, argued that irrespective of the Paper's recommendations his repertoire of varied teaching methods was being constrained by the National Curriculum - "I often feel under pressure to get things imparted and consequently I find that some of my techniques are not being used. I don't have the freedom of time, the opportunity in the classroom, to try something out and allow for the fact that it may not actually work...". It appears from Colin's testimony that, in this respect, the Discussion paper might be at variance with the effects of the National Curriculum.

It is significant that the class teachers should select this recommendation for particular comment. Although this recommendation of the Discussion Paper may have validated their pragmatic "mixture of approaches" it certainly did not create it. The employment of a repertoire of techniques was rooted in their experience.

Whole class teaching

Webb (1993) found that about half of the lessons she observed with Key Stage 2 children, during the course of her research into 50 primary schools in 13 local authorities, involved some whole class teaching which might bring into question the assertion of Alexander et al (1992) that "In many schools the benefits of whole class teaching have been insufficiently exploited" (Para 3.5). This latter view was confirmed by OFSTED (1993,

para. 11), which reported that "most teachers did not rule out the value of whole class teaching, but many did not sufficiently exploit the opportunities it provides".

The six teachers would all agree with a view expressed at the Prestwood First School staff meeting in May 1993 that "there are times when it is common sense to use that approach" (class teaching) and with Robin who stated "I have begun to put more emphasis on whole class teaching", and Ann who said "I think there is more chalk and talk. Although I have tried to keep practical things going, there is the problem of time." In spite of these apparent unanimous and straightforward responses, the issues which relate to whole class teaching are varied and subtle.

For example, there were diverse views relating to the reasons for an increased use of class teaching in the classroom. Ann and Robin, agreed with Hargreaves (1990) and argued that the main factor was "shortage of time with the National Curriculum". He continued "I think if I had more time I would not do so much class teaching". Colin, while agreeing with this view, stated that "the ethos of the school related to the expectations of parents and children" was an additional factor. Two other teachers also drew attention to the generally prevailing large class sizes which, they argued, impelled a teacher towards whole class teaching. It is perhaps significant that the reasons advanced tended to be defensive in tone and gave the impression that the teacher, perhaps unwillingly, was being compelled to adopt a greater element of class teaching.

Some teachers commented on the purposes of class teaching. Gill was anxious at the outset to apply her principle of "appropriateness" which is very similar to the Discussion Paper's "fitness of purpose". She asserted that class teaching was only one of many, varied methods which should be selected to match a specific purpose. She commented "It would be ridiculous to teach the same thing to five groups separately. You might as well do it as a class lesson but on the other hand it may be that something you are going to teach to one group of children working at their level is totally inappropriate for children working perhaps at the top level...". Gill also drew attention to the need for teacher judgement and flexible implementation. "There are some classes which lend themselves

to a high percentage of whole class teaching. So it is variable, I think, that is something which doesn't come across in the Alexander Report". Gill then continued by describing one of her main purposes in the use of class teaching. "I bring my class together at various times in the day. I like to start the day together and set out the day's work for the children. I owe it to them to give them an idea of what I am expecting. Then at various times in the day I scoop them together to identify where we have reached and to take them through to the next stage of their work". Jenny stated that "if I really want to deliver factual information then I find the best thing I can do is research that myself and then deliver it to the children very much as a starting point for development". Robin also commented on the use of whole class teaching for teacher exposition. "I think there are times when children all need to be told something and it is more efficient to tell everybody at the same time - rather than walk around and tell each group".

Alexander (1992) has drawn attention to the primary debate relating to the polarities of formal/informal and traditional/progressive. Class teaching may be seen as a key feature in this debate. An exchange during the Prestwood First School staff meeting in May 1993 highlights this. One teacher, apparently speaking from experience, during a discussion on class teaching, spoke of it being "banned" in some schools. Ann responded "I would feel very uncomfortable in a school where it was prescribed that you didn't class teach. Here we have always been fortunate that we are able to use the method which seems most appropriate for the task".

The comments of two of the teachers on their training courses at College also highlighted the same issue. Janet referred to her training at college in the late 1950s. In the context of class teaching she stated "A lot of things that are being recommended now were the things that I was taught at college and so it makes me wonder what has been taught in colleges over the last 30 years". Meanwhile, Gill spoke of her experience at college from which she graduated in 1972: "When I did my training we were not encouraged to teach the whole class. I think the approach taken was that you didn't teach the whole class except for a story. I remember making programmes of work for children individually".

Nevertheless, Gill found it difficult to come to terms with the notion of class teaching. Having observed her classroom practices, I pointed out to her that she undertook a considerable amount of class teaching. At first she was reluctant to admit this. She commented "My hackles came up immediately at the suggestion I taught the whole class, because I felt that wasn't right". Gill came to realise, after reflection, that there was a discrepancy between her practice and her perceptions of it. It may suggest that the influence of progressive ideology was strong, but by experience she had moved towards using a variety of methods including class teaching. The dialogue in the staffroom and the contrasting college experiences of Janet and Gill illustrate the centrality of the issue of class teaching in any debate on primary practices. It is significant to this debate that Simon (1992) should comment that "the rehabilitation of class teaching as an appropriate strategy, in certain circumstances, is overdue".

The teachers were in no doubt that the Discussion Paper had not changed their practice with respect to class teaching. For example, Robin said "I don't think it is the 'Three Wise Men' who have made me do more class teaching" and Ann stated "I don't think it has influenced me. I don't think I have changed because of it". It seems that whole class teaching has always been one element in their repertoire of methods. There was evidence that shortage of time as a consequence of National Curriculum requirements, especially in terms of content, had resulted in it being used more. Nevertheless, Jenny, Ann and Janet indicated that the recommendations of the Discussion Paper had validated their use of it. It may be, in respect of whole class teaching, the Discussion Paper like the Plowden Report reflected and described current practice in many schools.

The issue of topic/subject approaches

Alexander et al (1992, pp.21-23, paras. 62-72) consider curriculum structure and organisation in relation to subject and topic approaches. The Discussion Paper asserts that "the rhetoric of primary education has for a long time been hostile to the idea that young children should be exposed to subjects" (para 163). The "dogmas" which they castigate are partly related to cross-curricular topics and to an aversion to subject based

work. Alexander, Rose and Woodhead (1992, para. 66) argue that a National Curriculum conceived in terms of distinct subjects makes it impossible to defend a curriculum which does not highlight the particular characteristics of each subject. However, a danger inherent in this argument is that in avoiding the alleged complexity of addressing the curriculum through topics it might be replaced by the restricted simplicity of teaching solely to the attainment targets.

During the course of the interviews all six teachers offered their views, and outlined their practices, with regard to the subject/topic issue. Inevitably they were considerably influenced by the culture of the school of which they were a member. A short study will be made of Gill's response which will be followed by a brief survey of the views of others in so far as they reflect on Gill's practice.

Gill has been a teacher at Newtown First School for two years, at which the dominant mode of organising the curriculum was topic centred. Gill began by stating that "I have always based my term and classroom work around a topic. I must say that was very much the thinking I was brought up in the 1970s". Although she admitted that "There are times when I do agree with the 'Three Wise Men', you would try to hang everything on a topic to the point of the ridiculous really". However, Gill was very critical of the comments in the Discussion Paper on topic work "It suggested that topic based teaching was very limited because of copying from books and limited artwork. I have never ever in my topic work done anything like that. I bristled at some of the things they said because I felt people who are not teachers are going to be reading this and they are going to think this is how it is...". In commenting further on her topic based work she also said that she taught "Music, R.E. and P.E. as separate subjects". She asserted that her organisation has changed significantly since the advent of the National Curriculum - "I am still topic based but my topic tends to be related to a National Curriculum subject". For example, during the autumn term 1992 Gill's topic was based on 'Ancient Greece', a National Curriculum History unit. The major focus was historical and only when natural links with Geography, Art, Music and Technology emerged were these followed up. In

this context, Gill drew a distinction which was critical of the Discussion Paper. "They very much seemed to say we should be teaching individual subjects and that topic based teaching was wrong. I felt that perhaps if they had looked more closely at what teachers are really doing, perhaps they put the wrong emphasis there. I think now I am still topic based but I do have a main topic that tends to be linked to a National Curriculum subject...".

Gill had mixed views on this development, although she accepted the imperative of the National Curriculum - "I think now that we are taking on all the different National Curriculum subjects it does make sense. Yes, on the positive side, in terms of building up resources which are expensive then maybe it is more realistic". However, she voiced some misgivings. She was concerned about having to repeat work ' "I have done the Ancient Greece topic two years in a row, because it is an element of the National Curriculum and I might get stale. There are times when I feel it isn't appropriate to keep redoing the same thing. I like to get my teeth into something new". Gill also regretted the loss of her ability to select her own topics. "I feel that my freedom of choice is being impinged. Nobody likes having things dictated to them". Gill also referred to two special problems. She had a mixed aged class comprising Year 2 and Year 3 children and asserted "It's not really appropriate for the Year 2 children to revisit the same topic next year". In addition, there were implications for the schools to which the children will transfer at 8. "Now my Year 3 children have done the Ancient Greece topic this year we have to discuss with our middle school whether or not they will do the same topic next year".

Gill gave the impression that she had been satisfied with her former largely topic centred approach which she asserted "had related the children's understanding to real experience". However, as a direct response to the subject centred National Curriculum she had moved towards the strategy of a "topic largely based on a subject" - usually Science, History, Geography or Technology. The Discussion Paper (para. 70) refers to this as a "subject-focused" topic. Although she had had only a limited time to experience and to assess this

approach she deemed it "realistic" and in time with the developing culture of "a mixed mode of topic and subject approaches in her school". Again, this reflects the Discussion Paper's recommendation (para. 125) that teachers "will need to review how they plan and structure the curriculum, paying particular attention to the balance of subject and topic teaching". Although much of Gill's practice closely reflected the recommendations in the Discussion Paper, she asserted that it had not had much effect on her changed strategy. However, her comments demonstrated that she had considered its recommendations. She argued that the necessity of implementing the National Curriculum and the views of the headteacher and staff colleagues had been the major influences on her.

The strategies of Ann and Janet in respect of topic/subject approaches reflected the culture in their school. Like Gill they reported that class teachers now planned their work with a greater subject emphasis. "We took subjects on board because we wanted to be sure that children were exposed to the various strands of the curriculum and the National Curriculum forces us to focus on certain things. We are doing much more History, Geography and Science". Prestwood First School, as has been shown, had adopted two different strategies for enhancing subject expertise. A specialist teacher in Music had worked with all six classes following the recommendations in the Discussion Paper (para. 186). However, Janet asserted "We did realise (it was a recommendation of the Discussion Paper) but we didn't do it because of that. We did it because it was expedient". Webb (1993) also reported that many schools in her research operated exchanges of classes to enable teachers to use their subject expertise. In addition, Janet's work as Science co-ordinator reflecting another recommendation in the Discussion Paper (para. 79) resulted in collaborative planning for progression in Science throughout the school, stronger links in Science between teachers of classes with similar year groups and the development of appropriate resources.

Jenny reported that she had always employed "a mix of topic and subject approaches". She said that she had taught some subjects like Maths, English and R.E. separately and her topics "were carefully planned and structured with clear guidelines for the children

and with reference to subjects". Once again, Jenny asserted that the requirements of the National Curriculum, especially in the context of a Year 7 class, resulted in increasing subject emphasis. She argued that the recommendations in the Discussion Paper were "well balanced" and "made useful suggestions on how you could approach your teaching". Interestingly Jenny commented on the ethos of Little Kingshill Combined School, at which she had taken up her post as Deputy Headteacher in January 1992. She confirmed her Headteacher, Jeff Smith's, views, when she said "This is a school that has never been topic centred - it has been pretty formally subject based". She reported how, in the summer term 1993, she and her Headteacher had been involving the staff in a review of classroom practices: "We are keeping the best of what is subject orientated but making sure we are widening the approaches and broadening the curriculum. It is really a balance and a mix we are working to". Jenny argued that the Discussion Paper "justifies this approach" and that "it has backed us up". This use of the Discussion Paper as a means to reconsider "formal practice" and a subject-centred approach is unusual. It would appear to have been used in most schools with the opposite intention of fostering a more formal, and "subject focused" approach. In this context the advocacy of a "mixed economy" (OFSTED, 1993, p.13) by the Discussion Paper seems to be both credible and justified.

Robin reported that "Topics sometimes lacked progression and rigour. We are moving more and more towards subject based work. For example, most staff are finding it easier to do science separately". However, his colleague, Colin, was critical of the increasing emphasis on subjects and although agreeing with the Discussion Paper's recommendation that teachers "will need to know more about the subjects they teach" (para. 185) he asserted that solutions which challenged the role of the primary class teacher were anathema to him. He argued that "The National Curriculum had resulted in my professionalism being eroded and only appropriate in certain circumstances. I find it difficult to accept that science, music or technology, or work in any area of the primary curriculum, is beyond the ability of the large majority of teachers. I find it demeaning as a professional that although the National Curriculum is overloaded and prescriptive the

'Three Wise Men' suggest that teachers can't cope with all these areas at a sufficient level to disseminate to young people of 8 to 12" (Discussion Paper, para. 121). Colin maintained his position even when challenged with the issue of the first year of Key Stage 3 being taught in primary schools in Buckinghamshire. He gave an example. "If we look at Year 7 geography, I don't think as a professional I should say 'I don't know about ordnance survey maps. I'll pass my class over to a geography specialist'. It is the sort of information and the skills which I can take on board over time... the alternative is to release a lot of my authority to other individuals...". He concluded "I think a subject specialist in a primary or middle school should be a co-ordinator, an adviser to other teachers... I don't see him/her necessarily having to deliver...".

Once again, although the teachers had shown a willingness to consider the recommendations of the Discussion Paper all reported that it had not altered their practice. The main motive for change to a greater emphasis on subjects was the necessity of implementing the National Curriculum at both Key Stages 1 and 2 and the first year of Key Stage 3. OFSTED (1993 p.8) reported that "Over the years there was a noticeable shift towards designing topics that were more focussed on a single subject...". It is significant that some teachers, particularly two of the deputy headteachers, were prepared to use the Discussion Paper to legitimise existing practice or, indeed, to encourage change in selected, but contrasting, directions. Colin's passionate view relating to the professionalism and subject competence of the primary class teacher was rooted in his philosophy. It would be interesting to monitor Colin to see if his view changes in the light of more experience and the policies of his school. For example, the proposed Science scheme for the school year 1993-4 is scheduled for Year 7 and Colin will teach one of the classes in the Year group. Webb (1993) found no class teacher who believed, like Colin, that they had the subject knowledge needed to meet all the requirements of the National Curriculum and only a few who felt they could acquire it. Nevertheless it is perhaps true that most primary teachers aspire to all round competence as class teachers in the face of the National Curriculum, however difficult or unrealistic this may be. It is

significant that Robin, a former secondary teacher, asserted "I do feel it's our first responsibility to be as expert as we can in every subject as primary teachers".

The number of activities in a classroom at any time

Alexander et al (1992) attacked "dogmas" which were held responsible for "over-complex patterns of classroom practices" (para. 126). Previously in his own study of primary schools in Leeds Alexander (1992) had drawn attention to the same issue of classrooms in which numerous different activities were proceeding at the same time. OFSTED (1993, p.9) reported "There were more satisfactory or good lessons where the number of different activities undertaken, at any one time, was limited, usually to a manageable number of four or less".

Four of the teachers commented on the number of classroom activities at any given time. Colin lamented "I would love to be able to be doing more activities in the classroom. There were certainly times ten years ago when I would have five or six different activities going on in the classroom and they were productive. They were processes in which the children were deeply engaged...". He continued "I can't do those things in the same way now". During his interviews he was asked why this was so. Colin responded "I just don't have the freedom to operate as I have in the past. I don't have the opportunity to try something out. My ability to decide what is appropriate for the children at a particular time, my opportunity to choose what is appropriate for a group or an individual has been reduced". He identified the two major factors in bringing this about were the "overwhelming content" and "pressure on time" in the National Curriculum together with the ethos of the school. He explained "One is living in an environment and you have to function in that environment effectively".

Jenny, on the contrary, expressed satisfaction with the current climate. She could now proceed with conviction rather than expediency. "It (the Discussion Paper) has made me feel happier. I think there was a time when for your advancement you needed to teach in a certain way". Jenny explained that this "certain way" included a topic approach, the

children working in groups and "a number of activities going on in the classroom at the same time". Jenny continued "I felt you were being looked at to teach in a certain way and there were times when I almost had to compromise what I felt inside me was right, so that when you had a minor inspection you came out of it well". Alexander (1988) has drawn attention to teachers who have gained advancement by saying what the head/adviser wanted to hear and later, in *Policy and Practice in Primary Education* (1992) to the influence of a "dominant primary ideology".

Jenny concluded "I never like more than two different activities going on for the simple reason that with more than two I am not working at my best. I think you can adequately have two different activities going on and have a great deal of input and feedback, but not with more". Gill also outlined her practice in relation to activities. "I decide three pieces of work that we are going to access during the day - usually an English activity, a maths activity and perhaps some sort of art work and I will identify which groups are going to start with which activity". Gill was asked to explain the reasons for this approach. She responded "If they were all writing at the same time because I have got such different levels of achievement the demands on me would be such that I wouldn't feel it was satisfactory. In the same way it is disastrous to have all of them trying to sort their words out with the breakthrough sentence makers. You get one of these great crocodile queues of children waiting for words when I think they could be making better use of their time". Gill also stressed the importance of not only having different activities but having these activities at different stages. "I usually like to have one activity that they have already started. For instance, at the moment in science various tests on materials have been up and running now for more than a week, so it is something some children can begin with, they know where they are with it and they can carry on. An art activity can often be like that ...".

Thus three teachers had illustrated significant but diverse views and practices with regard to the issue of the number of classroom activities. One, looking back to his practice ten years ago, wished that current constraints had not restricted the number of his classroom

activities. A second teacher was relieved to be freed from the effects of this specific aspect of primary ideology which she believed had caused her sometimes to adopt practices against her judgement. The third teacher was satisfied with the three or four activities which had always been a feature of her classroom organisation and which, she believed, had been effective and had not been changed by recent developments. Gill's approach has been designated by Campbell (1993, p.97) as "multiple focus teaching". Their reactions to the recommendation in the Discussion Paper also varied. Colin was hostile in principle, while Jenny, and to a lesser degree Gill, believed it validated their existing practice. Once again the teachers had demonstrated their capacity to use the Discussion Paper to suit their individual purposes.

Cognitive Challenge

The Discussion Paper places considerable emphasis on "young children's immense cognitive and linguistic competence" (para. 53). This view is contrasted with Piagetian theories based on 'readiness' which the authors claim depress expectations and discourage teacher intervention. Simon (1992 p.93) has asserted the extreme importance of the theoretical standpoint taken in the Discussion Paper based on the view that "Only when there is widespread recognition of children's cognitive potentialities (and actual 'competence') can the teacher, as teacher, come into her own". The Discussion Paper (para.105) states that "the research evidence demonstrates very clearly that the level of cognitive challenge provided by the teacher is a significant factor in performance". However true and laudable this statement may be its authority is reduced by the omission of the source of the "research evidence". As Hammersley and Scarth (1993) have shown this habitual failure to attribute references directly has diminished the credibility of the Paper. The authors give some advice on the strategies necessary to offer this challenge - "One way of providing challenge is to set pupils demanding tasks. But, equally, it is important for teachers to organise their classrooms so that they have the opportunity to interact with their pupils; to offer explanations which develop thinking, to encourage speculation and hypothesis through sensitive questioning, to create, above all, a climate

of interest and purpose". This view is summarised in the final paragraph of the section on 'Quality of teaching in primary classrooms': "Good teaching does not merely keep step with the pupils but challenges and stretches their thinking" (para. 128). It is in this context that the views and practices of the six class teachers will be studied.

All the teachers implied, but in differing ways and with different degrees of emphasis, that they had high expectations of their children and aimed to stretch them intellectually. For example, Robin referred directly to the Discussion Paper - "I think that the 'Three Wise Men's' Report has made me think more about my expectations of pupils and I take that point very strongly. Expectations should always be high for children". Jenny referred to Piagetian theories. "I think we have tended to say 'Oh, well, they are not ready yet'. Well, some of us would never be ready, would we?", and emphasised the importance of the teacher in providing direction and motivation.

The intention of this study is, while acknowledging such grand designs, to try to identify some indications of the specific context and practices which may provide opportunities for cognitive challenge, with particular emphasis on questioning children. Gill, for example, emphasises the necessity for the teacher to have realistic expectations of each child "I feel expectations have to be appropriate to the child. It's no good just having overall high expectations. I will always expect a great deal of every child. A child who doesn't put much effort in as a great irritant to me. A child who will try and push himself to the limit of his ability, I will always praise... I would always admit that some children's highest level is going to be much lower than other children's level".

There were indications from the teachers that they believed the social and emotional development of children cannot be separated from the intellectual and the former provides a bedrock for building the latter. In this respect, like Dadds (1992), and The National Primary Centre (1992), some teachers argued that the Discussion Paper paid relatively little attention to the social development of children. For example, Colin asserted "I think you have got to make sure the children in your care are functioning cognitively at as high a level as possible but they can't do that if they are not reasonably

cared for and if they haven't got the ability to interact socially with others. I think the two have got to go together". Gill commented in the same vein "You can't just concentrate on the intellectual and ignore the social. I don't think you can separate the two out. They both have to work hand in hand". She stated that "It (the Discussion Paper) didn't have a lot to say about the social training of children... it did talk quite a lot about progression and continuity but it didn't suggest that in any social way at all which I felt showed a lack of understanding of first schools". Jenny stressed the link between good behaviour in the classroom and academic achievement. "I feel that your expectations both on behaviour and what the children can do should be high". Colin commented on some of the social and interpersonal aspects of teachers' questions in the classroom. He analysed the problem of the child to whom he had addressed a question in the fairly certain knowledge that she would be able to answer. "There is the situation where a child has a problem with the answer and she is not thinking clearly enough so you keep re-framing the question... Isn't it better, perhaps, to tell her? But you are not just taking a short cut, you have also missed an opportunity of getting her to think in a particular way and you are going to have to wait until the next time. I realised in this situation that whatever way I questioned that child who was all tensed up, she was not going to be able to answer... she was obviously under pressure and it was best for me to tell her the answer".

Robin identified two areas of guidance in the Discussion Paper which had sharpened the challenge in his teaching. He commented on the importance of progression. "We do need to be aware of the children always being given work that is progress for them both within the class and from year to year. It is something that I see as a little bit weak in my teaching and in other primary teaching". He also referred to demanding more from his pupils (para. 126). Robin explained that he had tended to prepare tasks for the "middle" which he stated "may not be enough from those that I feel can cope with the work fairly easily so it has made me differentiate much more clearly".

In the context of challenging children, Janet and Ann urged a note of caution. Their view was that the demands of the National Curriculum, far from enhancing the learning of the less able children, had resulted in a deterioration of provision. This concern was very much in their minds as it had been considered in a staff meeting. Ann stated "I feel very much that the less capable children are not getting what they should from me. They are being pushed forward in some areas, or exposed to activities which they are not ready for and they are not always getting the work they should have and they are not being allowed the time. They are an anxiety because they are not getting all they should have and they are likely to fall further back". These perceptions were shared by Janet and are indicative of the dilemma many teachers experience in trying to keep their views of the needs of children and the requirements of the National Curriculum in balance. Colin, as we have seen, voiced the same concern "My ability to decide what is appropriate for the children has been reduced".

The views of the teachers with respect to the specific skill of asking questions proved an interesting commentary on the Discussion Paper's recommendation for the teacher to "use a variety of questioning modes, seeking to combine recall questions with those which challenge and encourage pupils to think for themselves" (para. 138). Nevertheless, it is probable that the use of such a strategy has always been in the repertoire of most teachers.

It was suggested that the National Curriculum assessment had contributed to the development of teachers' questioning. For example, Ann stated "I think there has been more (use of questions) but it has very much concerned assessment. We are having to have evidence of their attainment". She suggested that one of the best devices for checking whether individual children had understood was through questioning. Gill made a similar point "I have found out that when the children have done some investigations there are some children about which I have honestly been able to say that they understand. I will have a 'hit list' of children with which I need to discuss that work. In the science we are doing I have worked alongside them and I know perfectly well they understand what they are doing and I don't feel that I need to cross-examine them any

further. But there are other children you are not really sure they have understood and, particularly in group work situations, you need to be able to identify by questioning what each child understands".

The importance of questions from the teacher structured in such a way as to guide children's discussion was highlighted. For example, Jenny commented on the dangers of asking over-ambitious questions like 'How do you think the universe developed?' She suggested that "You can be dealing with areas of which the children have very little knowledge, so you have to offer them some construction to make them think about it... you have to give them certain lead-ins... Gill commented similarly by giving an example: "We are looking at different sorts of bricks at the moment, a group at a time, because it is then a more of a hands-on experience. During that time I would hope to be on hand to draw out their discussion. I don't think you can just throw over discussion, give a pile of bricks to a group of 7 year olds and say 'Discuss these'. They don't know how to go about it".

On the other hand, asking questions is not just the prerogative of the teacher. Gill, for example, stated "I hope I have always given children the opportunity to discuss and to suggest possibilities... without my saying this is definitely the right way and this is what happens". In this context she referred specifically to science Attainment Target 1. "I have to get the children to ask questions and to explore and investigate things...". Colin, too, stressed the importance of children being able to ask their own questions. He argued that the teacher was responsible for establishing a favourable ethos in the classroom and exercising "the appropriate sort of enthusiasm which gets the children asking questions".

This survey has attempted to give some insights relating to teachers' practical responses to the issue of cognitive challenge with special reference to the technique of questioning outlined in the Discussion Paper. Once again, their views reflected their classroom practices which were rooted in the realities of implementing the National Curriculum. Nevertheless, there was an awareness of the particular issues and recommendations in the Discussion Paper.

Assessment and recording

There was evidence of considerable anger and criticism among all six teachers in relation to assessment. The teachers focused on the practical experiences of implementing National Curriculum assessment. It was a major concern. Although they did not refer in specific detail to the Discussion Paper's brief overview and recommendations with regard to assessment (paras. 111-116) there was an underlying criticism of the Alexander et al (1992) unwillingness to challenge the purposes, structure and practices of National Curriculum assessment. For example, the authors assert "There is no doubt, however, that, whatever the difficulties experienced in managing the first round of standard assessment tasks, National Curriculum assessment procedures have accelerated the development process. Assessment is now becoming more open, systematic and comprehensive". This is the only reference to assessment "difficulties" in the Discussion Paper.

Gipps (1988, 1990) has suggested that most assessment in primary schools before 1988 had been narrowly focused tests of reading, number and comprehension predominantly at the end of the infant and junior stages. Nevertheless the teachers all argued that their general assessment practices were operating satisfactorily before the advent of National Curriculum. For example, Ann asserted "I would have thought that most teachers even before the National Curriculum were regularly assessing and recording, and probably doing that rather more diagnostically than at present", while Janet commented "I always did assess. It was more relevant to what I did. I could, at any time, have told anybody exactly where a child was". Colin stated "I think I monitored children's work in the past very adequately indeed. I am monitoring and assessing children every minute of the day. You can't teach on a regular basis unless you are assessing day to day. You can't control a class of children unless you are assessing them". Gill said "I have always kept ongoing records of where children are. That's always been one of my strategies. For example, I always liked to have my finger on what level they were with their reading and where I want them to go next, so assessment in that way wasn't a new thing".

However, from their responses, there was evidence of shortcomings. For example, the Discussion Paper's criticism (para.111) that assessment and recording in the past was "largely intuitive" and "idiosyncratic" may have been apposite. In addition, there was evidence that their assessment and recording "tended to be limited to the basics" (para.111). For example, Janet said "I assessed at what level they were on spelling, on reading and on maths". Nevertheless, the collective perception of the teachers was that their former practices in assessment and recording had been satisfactory. The teachers implied that they believed assessing and recording were part of their professional practice. They reacted in the same way as Pollard (1992, p.114) has outlined. They were not opposed to the "principle of teacher assessment" and their main criticisms related "to the workload and practicality of implementation and administration".

- The intensity of their feelings towards assessment in the National Curriculum was manifest. For example, three teachers used the term "bogged down" while Jenny commented that assessment was exercising "a stranglehold". Gill asserted that it was "wearisome" while Colin stated "I resent the idea that a sheet full of boxes for every subject area is going to improve my ability to assess or monitor the children's work". "Ticking boxes" was a dominant image. For example, Jenny said "I think people are getting more obsessed with having boxes ticked than they are with what they really know about the individual child". She also referred to what Campbell (1993, p.97) has called the "Key Stage Cops" syndrome - "teachers think the person up there is going to be judging and saying 'Oh, she hasn't covered very much'".

All six teachers referred to the time consuming aspect of assessment, confirming the findings of Osborn and Pollard (1990). For example, Janet commented "Teachers' time is taken, if not in the classroom, out of the classroom in non-contact time, and in the evening when you could have been doing something more relevant to what you want to teach the next day". Gill reported "You can spend hours of time actually scooping up the children you are not sure about with one little element".

The two teachers who had administered S.A.T.S. with their two children, Ann and Gill, both commented on the length of time involved in administering the tests - "As far as S.A.T.S. are concerned, I have to say it took me away from the children in my class for quite a considerable time". Gill added "I do resent the time out from my class" and identified some of the consequences of this: "I feel the children missed me. I tried to make sure the time was spent when the rest of the class was busy at other things. I used assembly times, play times, dinner times... but I was concerned that particularly the children who were assessed at Level W or Level 1 were almost on the reject pile because I didn't have to take them any further with the testing and yet the children I was testing at Level 4 went through the whole gamut and even had to be taken beyond the level I knew they had achieved. They had a maximum amount of my time and the children who I wasn't testing had to be kept busy and I like them to be doing purposeful things. It was time consuming and no teacher minds their time being used for something if it is of value, but at the end of the day it didn't show up anything I hadn't already assessed". Torrance (1990) in an article drawn from letters sent to him by teachers, has identified similar concerns.

Campbell et al (1991) has drawn attention to the extensiveness of teachers' workloads as well as the intensiveness of primary teaching. Two teachers spoke of "a feeling of being under pressure". Ann, for example, explained that she felt "under far more pressure" with S.A.T.S. this year "because of the teacher assessment and the great emphasis on having to give evidence of attainment". Ann had, for the first time in her career, contacted her professional association to voice her concerns, and Gill uncharacteristically reported "I was not as enthusiastic... because I found it so wearisome". Although Pollard (1992, p.111) has referred to the suspicion that primary teachers may have of "standardised procedures" which are seen "to threaten key tenets of a child-centred ideology" the main criticisms of S.A.T.S. voiced by Ann and Gill were related largely to the practical difficulties.

There was also criticism of the purposes of the tests in relation to the political context. Robin, for example, was hostile "to the overtly political idea of assessing schools and regular league tables which is a blatant attempt to have the schools judged": Indeed, Gipps (1993) has drawn attention to the publication in LEA league tables of the results of the 1991 S.A.T.S. in spite of schools and LEAs being informed that since it was a trial run no such thing would happen. Moreover, the draft report in July 1992 from an independent evaluation commissioned at Leeds University by S.E.A.C. stated that the results were unreliable and concluded "In a context where the results of assessment may be made public, schools with large numbers of ethnic minority children, children from deprived social backgrounds or even younger rather than older children would not appear in a particularly good light. The reasons for this would under these circumstances have little to do with the quality and appropriateness of the education being offered".

Janet was concerned with the professional implications - "We are being told on television and radio if you don't have these tests then the teachers won't be able to identify the poor children, which is an insult. We can tell you within one term, within one week even, which children need extra help". This view was endorsed unanimously at the Prestwood First School staff meeting. Gill spoke on the same theme: "I think what I resent is the suggestion that we don't know the point the children are at. One of the things I do in the summer holiday is to get some idea of my new class from previous teachers' records. I resent the suggestion that we need to have all this, sometimes fairly irrelevant, paper-work to do, just to say we are right". Three teachers identified lack of consultation over assessment as another concern. For example, Janet conveyed a feeling of impotence - "We have allowed it to happen, but we have had very little say in it. There was very little we could do because everything we do is made to appear we are being bolshie and not wanting to do the work". Colin asserted "I feel angry that the profession has been hijacked. The idea that a detached body which really hasn't had consultation with the profession can devise tests that are effective and appropriate and take up all this time, and money, I find it mind-boggling and absurd". Janet was also critical of the "expense of

those tests which could have been put into funding special needs" while Gill spoke of "the waste of reams of paper".

There was also much criticism of the tests themselves. There were strong indications the teachers believed, like Campbell (1993, p.98) that assessment was not integrated diagnostically into teaching. For instance, Robin reported "I think the T.G.A.T. Report was on the right track. I was quite optimistic about assessment in 1989. I was involved in Records of Achievement... and it opened my eyes to what learning really was. You planned for assessment. For the first time I had a really good picture of how children learn from the beginning to the end. But I am afraid it has become completely bogged down now. It just doesn't seem to work any more". Colin argued that tests would be better "in the Scottish way" - notifying the results only to parents and having "a range of tests which they can take off the shelf and apply when they think it appropriate to the child". It seems the perceptions of the teachers are similar to Black (1993), the Chairman of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing, that the formative processes of assessment embedded in classroom practice have been sidelined in favour of providing end of stage results for summative purposes. Although it was evident that the teachers were not opposed in principle to some form of external testing to provide a national standard and to moderate their assessment as a kind of quality assurance, they were very critical of the current system of testing. They argued that it created a bureaucratic nightmare which, to some extent, had trivialised their work and that of their children. In short, they reported that the correct balance between teacher and external assessments had not been achieved.

There was also a feeling that National Curriculum assessment was restricting. Robin commented on "the narrow National Curriculum assessment" and of "teaching for tests". He explained "Box-ticking doesn't make a good assessment of a child's ability and I think I speak for a lot of my colleagues in the view that passing on to the next teacher a lot of ticked boxes really means very little about the child's achievement. The idea of children assessing themselves, the idea of a wider pattern of accreditation and recognition of all their achievements, seems now to be not in favour or there is no time for it". In the same

vein Gipps (1993, p.40) argues for "open forms of assessment" including "self-evaluation and reflection on their learning". Robin then identified another area of restriction. "If you are up against it you are just going to teach towards the attainment targets. If the results are being published and we are being held to account for it, even more reason why you will just want your children to do as well as they can, rather than looking at their general education. It is a cynical view but I am afraid that's human nature...". Both Gill and Ann referred to the issue of excessive detail. Ann spoke of "this amount of minute detail in every strand" while Gill reported on "the fine detail of the assessments and the sheer load of paperwork". Finally Jenny drew attention to the transient nature of assessment - "If you assessed a child on the same thing six weeks later it is likely it will be forgotten".

Assessment was the issue about which the teachers spoke with considerable emotion. It is worth noting that the final interviews took place during the public and professional turmoil of the boycott of the government's tests in the spring and early summer of 1993. Much anger and resentment were evident as well as a reflective critique of the effects of aspects of National Curriculum assessment and recording on their classroom practices. No teacher referred directly to the Discussion Paper's recommendations on assessment and recording apart from a general view that it did neither identify nor address their concerns. It is probable that this shortcoming impaired the credibility of the Discussion Paper for teachers.

Conclusion

There was a discernible but limited change in the curriculum policies of headteachers and in the practices of class teachers during the eighteen months in which data was collected. However, these changes which have been surveyed varied from teacher to teacher and cannot be directly ascribed to the influence of the Discussion Paper but rather to the continued implementation of the National Curriculum. Nevertheless, the Discussion Paper commented on, and reinforced, many of the policies and practices developing from

the National Curriculum and was mainly used by both headteachers and teachers as a kind of resource to legitimise certain of their policies and practices.

The Discussion Paper was interpreted in different ways by different teachers. For example, Trevor Dooks asserted that "it represented a change in direction. Many primary teachers were ill at ease with Plowden ideology and welcomed recommendations for more formal teaching with a range of teaching styles and organisational patterns". Yet his Deputy Headteacher, Colin, regarded the Paper with considerable hostility for "its attack on progressivism". Vulliamy and Webb (1993) have argued the ways in which teachers translate new initiatives into practice are dependent upon their prior beliefs and practices. It is equally true that the manner in which teachers perceive innovations is based on their original convictions.

The impact of the Discussion Paper, according to the four headteachers and six class teachers, was largely limited by two factors. It had no legal authority. One class teacher asserted "I only have time for legal requirements - I have no time to read the 'Three Wise Men's' Report". Its influence was also, to some extent, impaired by the political context in which it was commissioned, published and delivered to schools. For example, Robin asserted "It is difficult to avoid the politics of it all".

A comment from Gill perhaps best illustrates the uncertainty of teachers with regard to the Discussion Paper, and of its subtle influence on schools and classrooms. "I think in retrospect it probably hasn't had much influence. I don't think people are too conscious of it but in discussion perhaps things have come from it which we didn't necessarily know came from the 'Three Wise Men'. For example, curriculum co-ordinators. I think we are more concerned about that and progression. That comes out of it, but I wasn't really aware that it was specifically there".

Nevertheless, it may be that the Discussion Paper had a certain accessibility to teachers. Although it was based on research, albeit with imperfections, it was rather different from other research studies which are often perceived by teachers to belong to an alien,

academic culture. Copies were also distributed to every school. In some respects it appears to have acted as a focal point for reference and discussion and as a catalyst. In the case of Buckinghamshire headteachers it was further mediated and legitimised by the Local Authority which included Alexander's 'modifications' in his Misbourne address. The favourable comments made in the OFSTED Report (1993, pp.11-12): "Many of the heads felt that a debate on such issues was long overdue", "The Paper was generally considered positive and helpful" and "Many heads considered it genuinely consultative" found some echoes in the four schools. The Discussion Paper had encouraged a certain reflectivity providing teachers with a basis for considering their classroom practices.

However, headteachers and class teachers in the four schools have pragmatically concentrated on what is required by law. Their changes in policies and practices have been much more the product of National Curriculum imperatives than the Discussion Paper's recommendations. This finding tallies with OFSTED (1993 p.11) - the "necessary debate was constrained by the welter of documentation and demands currently placed on primary schools".

Conclusion

A phased process of mediation

The major aim of this study has been to examine how a central governmental initiative was mediated to class teachers in schools. The progress of the Discussion Paper has been charted from inception to application. The process of its impact may be viewed as a chain reaction. Each link in the chain, or phase, in this process had its own characteristics. The Discussion Paper not only affected the various agencies through which it passed but was also affected itself.

1. Secretary of State/Government

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2. 'Three Wise Men'

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3. Media

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4. L.E.A.

|

5. Headteachers

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6. Class teachers

Phase one involved the commissioning of the Paper by the Secretary of State, Kenneth Clarke. Although he insisted his "purpose was to initiate a debate not impose solutions" and "it is not for the Secretary of State to tell teachers how to teach or organise their classes" it seems clear that he had been persuaded by the policies of the 'New Right', particularly the Centre for Policy Studies, that control over the curriculum without pedagogic direction might restrict the Government's educational reforms. Clarke, in commissioning the report, left little doubt as to the conclusion he hoped for. His public pronouncements, at the time, were very clear. He advocated 'back to basics', a return to

"common sense" and the value of traditional approaches with an emphasis on instruction. He attacked "child-centred teaching methods" based on the "dogma of the Plowden Report" as well as the academic establishment which he argued upheld a progressive ideology. He declared that his main motive was to raise standards. However, it is likely that he was also acting on political considerations. An attack on primary teaching methods together with a policy based on raising standards might prove an effective vote-winner in an election year. Moreover, the commissioning of a report might create a view that positive action was being taken by the Government. The teaching strategies he advocated are traditionally associated with right wing views and the methods in themselves have political implications.

Phase two involved the partial translation of the Secretary of State's programme into the status of a public report by distinguished educationalists. It has been shown how the process of writing the Discussion Paper became a "site of struggle" and how the personal and professional views of the authors, together with their membership of different "interest groups" influenced the outcome. The three authors, as part of their remit, mediated the convictions of the Secretary of State and produced a report which certainly embodied some of his views but neither as completely nor as stridently as his original programme, although some of the 'sound-bites' like the references to 'dogmas' were offensive to some.

The reception by the media constituted phase 3. Simon (1992) has commented on the "media hullabaloo and deliberate representation". This phase, indeed, was characterised by a melodramatic media inflating and distorting the Discussion Paper. The comments of the Secretary of State in the press and on radio before, and during, the commissioning of the Discussion Paper, together with its reception - particularly in the press, undoubtedly impaired the 'image' of the Discussion Paper at the outset and restricted its effectiveness later. This particularly affected teachers who were not able to read the Discussion Paper until it was sent to schools over two weeks after the press launch on January 22. The publication and launching of the Discussion Paper had provided a 'story' for the press.

Phase 4 of the mediation process involved the local authorities. Buckinghamshire, like "the majority of L.E.A.s, responded positively" (OFSTED, 1993, p.17). The county, in the context of the diminution of its powers, had mounted an initiative with varying degrees of success. Its mediation did much to promote a general awareness of the Discussion Paper and Alexander's address enhanced both its image and its message. It tried like "many L.E.A.s, to widen the debate by involving governing bodies and elected members" (OFSTED, 1993, p.17) but the production of *Achieving Quality* generally resulted in negative responses. Moreover, although, like "some L.E.A.s", it addressed "the issue of disparity in funding between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3" (OFSTED, 1993, p.38) little tangible was achieved apart from a promise that this disparity would be sympathetically considered by the Education Committee "when resources permitted". This proved a major disappointment to headteachers who believed that the report from Coopers and Lybrand (1991) on the necessity for enhanced primary funding and the recommendation of Alexander et al (1992 para. 4) had considerably strengthened the case for improved funding at both local and national levels. These failures inherent in Buckinghamshire's initiative were reflected, to a degree, by some negative responses to the Discussion Paper.

The role of the headteachers as "gatekeepers" and their mediation of the Discussion Paper constituted phase 5. Their initial responses to the Paper varied but most used it to foster staff debate and all selected particular aspects of the Discussion Paper to legitimise specific policies. In this respect it was used as a kind of resource. It was not accepted in its entirety but headteachers invoked certain recommendations for favourable mediation to staff. The sixth phase of the process may be characterised as the application of the Discussion Paper in the classroom. Some diminution of the political nature of the Paper may be discerned at this stage. It may be that by the time that the Paper had potential influence on classroom practices its political purposes had largely been served. Clarke had sustained, and probably enhanced, his political standing in some quarters by his policies as Secretary of State. His reputation as "the hit-man of British politics" was certainly maintained. An election had been won. Much of the Government's original

educational policy had been retained but the controversy over testing and the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council (1993) in relation to the manageability of the National Curriculum may have translated the focus away from primary pedagogy. Nevertheless, there was a residual concern, in some quarters, that the Government's interest in classroom practice might be revived and could possibly lead to further initiatives or even legislation.

Class teachers, on the whole, did not view the Discussion Paper as a complete programme which had to be accepted or rejected. Rather, like their headteachers, they saw it as a resource with discrete recommendations, some of which were acceptable and others which could be resisted simply by non-compliance. They felt it was not unduly critical of their practices but believed they were under no compulsion to accept or to apply its recommendations in full or in part. On the whole they selected aspects of it which legitimised their existing practices. They viewed the Paper as endowing retrospective validation of practices in their classrooms rather than initiating new ones.

During its progress through the six phases the meaning of the Discussion Paper was interpreted differently by different agencies and people. Its impact was equally variable and diverse. However, there is some evidence to suggest that as it moved from centre to locality, from Government to classroom, its political edge was diminished and its educational influence predominated. The progress of the Discussion Paper was also marked by various 'interest groups' seizing opportunities to exploit it. For example Clarke and the government had used it to their advantage. The media had exploited it. It had served to reinforce the position of the N.C.C. and Woodhead. It had entered the discourse of academics and some Local Authorities had mediated it. Thus politics and education were inextricably linked during the 'career' of the Discussion Paper.

The significance of the Discussion Paper for schools

The Discussion Paper represented a governmental intervention into primary pedagogy. It can be argued that teachers viewed the "how" of teaching as their exclusive preserve - the

last vestige of what was termed "the secret garden of the curriculum" since other areas including content and assessment had been the subject of legislation. The purposes and extent of Kenneth Clarke's intentions in commissioning the Paper have been discussed. Although Clarke had asserted "Questions about how to teach are not for the Government to determine" it is significant that exactly one year later Mr. John Patten, the Secretary of State, in his letter to primary Headteachers accompanying the National Curriculum Council (1993) and OFSTED (1993) reports urged that "all schools should address the following issues" which included "the introduction of setting where possible, and of grouping by ability within the class if setting is not possible", "the greater use of specific subject teaching for older children in particular, and further improvement in the planning of topic work", "the greater use of specialist or semi-specialist teaching", "more use of whole class teaching" and "limiting the number of activities taking place in classrooms at any one time". Clearly the Government was still interested in, and concerned with, primary classroom practice a year after the publication of the Discussion Paper. Whether this presages a further Government intervention into primary pedagogy at some time in the future is an open question.

Another major significance of the Discussion Paper was its criticism of "highly questionable dogmas" (para. 3.2) which it alleged were a product of "an ideology" based on "Plowdenism" to which "thousands of teacher have unthinkingly subscribed". The intemperate language of the Discussion Paper has been questioned together with the more serious issue of the prevalence of the progressive ideology it criticises - for example, Bennett (1976) and Galton and Simon (1980). Nevertheless, the Paper presents a serious challenge to this ideology and argues for the principles of "striking a balance", "fitness for purpose", and selection from a repertoire to be applied to classroom techniques and organisation. Although some have argued that Alexander et al (1992) have merely succeeded in formulating a new ideology the Discussion Paper offers a way out of sterile debates based on "simplistic dichotomies" like formal/informal and subject centred/child centred which have been a common feature of primary discourse. The Plowden Report of 1967 caught the spirit of its times and set a trend. In the same way it may be that the

Discussion Paper of 1992 not only reflected the current climate but may eventually prove to have established ideas which will also be influential in the next 25 years.

The recommendations of the Discussion Paper in relation to cognitive challenge were also significant. Simon (1992) for example commented favourably on its criticism of a rigid application of Piagetian notions of readiness and advocacy of a social constructivist approach based on Vygotsky. The concept of a holistic approach in primary education has been influential and it may be that a sharper focus on the intellectual development of children may be timely. Nevertheless, there was criticism from academics - for example, Dadds (1992) and some teachers that the Discussion paper neglected the social and emotional nurturing of children. In addition, responses to the Discussion paper from N.A.H.T. (1992) and the National Primary Centre (1992) criticised the emphasis in the Paper on teaching, rather than how children learn. This reaction may give substance to the view of Alexander (1992) that teaching and learning should not be regarded as polarities but as two aspects of the same enterprise.

It may be that one of the most enduring legacies of the three authors will be their questioning of the class teacher role (para. 149). OFSTED (1993 pp.18-19) claimed inelegantly that "the Discussion Paper is encouraging a dispassionate examination of that most sacred of primary "sacred cows" - the class teacher system. Its strengths and weaknesses are being debated; it is no longer a given in the discourse about primary education". There was evidence in three of the four schools in this study of pilot schemes adopting new patterns of organisation which supplement but do not supersede the class teacher. OFSTED (1993 p.19) confirms this development nationally - "the small but significant number of primary schools engaged in a measure of semi-specialist teaching constitutes a significant bridgehead". However, OFSTED (1993 .19) reports further developments are inhibited by "financial limitations rather than ideological objections". Although lack of funding is undoubtedly a factor, the assertion that schools are not opposed in principle to a change in the class teacher system is more problematic.

The Paper makes a considerable contribution to the debate concerning organisational strategies and teaching techniques. It distinguishes between teaching methods or techniques and the organisational strategies teachers employ. Often the two have been confused. The sections on whole-class, group and individual teaching are well argued and provide a useful basis for thought and discussion. There is little doubt that teachers need the skill and judgement to select and to apply whatever organisational strategies are appropriate to the task. However, it is likely that many more teachers than the Paper acknowledges already possess such skills and judgement. The Discussion Paper argues strongly for the value of whole class teaching but in its consideration of this method it stresses its strengths rather than its weaknesses. The Paper emphasises the importance of teaching techniques such as explaining, questioning and instructing but neglects to mention other direct methods like describing, demonstrating, defining and predicting. The paper also has little to say about the value of indirect teaching methods such as broadcasts, work sheets, books and computer programmes. Nevertheless, the Paper raises issues which provide a practical basis on which teachers collectively or individually can review their classroom practices.

The Discussion Paper's advocacy of enhanced funding for the primary sector was opportune. Subsequently many commentators including Alexander (1993) in articles in the Times Educational Supplement have urged that this recommendation should be implemented. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any appreciable improvement in primary funding in the last two financial years, either locally or nationally. Significantly OFSTED (1993, p.19) refers to the primary funding issue but without particular emphasis. There are many other issues raised in the Discussion Paper including the role of the headteacher, and the future pattern of teacher training, but emphasis has been accorded to those issues which appear to be of immediate major classroom significance, and have been the subject of considerable debate in schools.

Why the Discussion Paper's influence was limited in schools

Although the Discussion Paper was reasonably accessible to teachers in terms of its format and presentation and availability in schools it has exercised a limited influence. There are many reasons to account for this. A major factor is that the Discussion Paper was not mandatory. Its official status was that of a discussion paper for consultative purposes. Headteachers and class teachers were largely free to take it up or discard it at will. As we have seen, it has been used mainly as a resource with teachers selecting or rejecting recommendations as they chose. It can be argued that since there is so much legislation which schools are required to implement, a Paper which was not prescribed by law would inevitably attract a low priority.

A second major factor relates to the manageability of the National Curriculum. This is the central concern of teachers. Although there was considerable evidence of National Curriculum "overload" - for example, Campbell et al (June 1991) the three authors side-stepped rather than addressed the issue of manageability. Moreover, the authors were not as sympathetic as they might have been to the difficulties of schools and teachers struggling to cope with multiple innovations introduced quickly. The Discussion Paper alienated many teachers by not seriously challenging the manageability and the structure of the National Curriculum. However, their reluctance to question fundamentally the National Curriculum may stem from their remit which assumed the continuance of the National Curriculum in its present form and asked that the issues of curriculum organisation and classroom practice should be addressed on that assumption. Since the publication of the Discussion Paper considerable research evidence - for example Campbell and Neill (October 1992) - has contributed to a rigorous questioning of manageability which found official expression in the National Curriculum Council (1993) and OFSTED (1993) reports. Not only was the question of whether the three authors possessed a real awareness of teachers' difficulties with regard to the National Curriculum raised but also misgivings were voiced about the timing of the Discussion Paper. If the predominant current issue is how the National Curriculum might be

reconstituted to preserve its undoubted benefits but to ease its overwhelming demands on teachers, then it can be argued that the publication of the Discussion Paper in January 1992 was both untimely and distracting. Teachers were preoccupied with the implementation of the National Curriculum and on the whole had limited time and energy to devote to a consideration of classroom methodology. Once the outline of a reconstituted National Curriculum is in place then it may be that an important and long overdue debate on pedagogy will ensue. Indeed, the untimely introduction of the Discussion Paper and its failure to challenge the National Curriculum may have delayed the very process Alexander et al hoped to encourage.

There is evidence of considerable suspicion of the Discussion Paper among some teachers. This was grounded in Clarke's strident comments on primary classroom practices at the time he commissioned the authors. It was compounded by the media reaction following the publication of the Paper and the delay of over two weeks before it was available in schools. There were also misgivings about the authors - their gender, their recent experience of teaching in primary schools, the haste with which the Paper was prepared and that they had not consulted teachers in preparing it. There were also questions relating to their objectivity and to their unanimity. The public disagreement of two of the authors in the pages of *The Guardian* caused concern among many teachers and, perhaps, contributed to a negative response to the Paper. Some teachers were also alienated by its confrontational style in certain passages. The Paper concerns pedagogy and classroom organisation which lie at the heart of primary teachers' professionalism. It touches on many sensitive issues not always sensitively. Moreover, the trenchant criticism of "an ideology" based on "Plowdenism" offended many and arguably may have reinforced progressive beliefs by fostering arguments associated with their defence. Dadds (1992) represents this type of response from an academic.

There was also a growing sense of disappointment among headteachers and their staffs that the recommendation of the Discussion Paper with regard to enhanced funding for the primary sector was not acted upon at either local or national levels. For example, there

was a strong sentiment among Buckinghamshire headteachers that there were two elements in the county initiative. The heads' responsibilities were to make their staffs and governors aware of the Discussion Paper and, in the light of it, review practices in their schools. The role of the officers, with supporting evidence provided by schools, was to persuade the Education Committee to provide improved funding. When the latter was not achieved there was considerable disappointment and a feeling that part of an agreed programme had not been delivered. This perception may have resulted in a gradual loss of impetus in the debate over the Discussion Paper in Buckinghamshire schools. In addition there was an anxiety among some that the Paper might be the harbinger of further governmental intervention into primary methodology - possibly even legislation.

A final perspective

Ball and Bowie (1992), Osborn and Broadfoot (1992) and Vulliamy and Webb (1993) have all stated that new policies have to be mediated through teachers and they respond in ways related to their values and beliefs. It is not surprising in this context given the welter and pace of innovation that teachers have responded to the Discussion Paper in different ways. Various adaptations have been noted, ranging from "enrichment to resistance". Woods (1993) applied these modes of adaptation in the context of teachers and the National Curriculum but this model may be brought to bear on to the reactions of teachers to any innovation - in this case the Discussion Paper.

It would be inaccurate to claim that the Discussion Paper has effected substantial change. It is primarily the requirements of the National Curriculum which have caused schools and teachers to appraise their practices both before and after the publication of the Discussion Paper. Moreover, the OFSTED Report (1993, p.18) concedes that "the culture of primary teaching has not changed overnight. It would be unrealistic to expect a discussion paper to bring about changes in this or that aspect of practice". One of the authors of the Discussion Paper, Woodhead (1993, p.18), has commented "No discussion paper, however wise, can transform the day-to-day reality of primary teaching".

OFSTED (1993, p.18) asserts that "The paper was designed to promote discussion based on a review of classroom practice in the light of the new demands stemming mainly from the National Curriculum" but admits that "the debate is already being overshadowed by growing concerns about what many perceive to be an 'overloaded' National Curriculum". Although the same report suggests that in view of this the debate though valuable "may be short-lived" it may prove that the opposite will be true. If the National Curriculum is re-constituted along more manageable lines, primary teachers may respond positively by reviewing a debate focused on their classroom practices within a shared curriculum framework.

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